



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

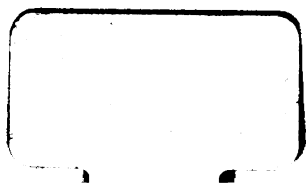
HN 1L6V D



THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

FRANCES POWELL

KD 11503



W. S. W.

Helen W. Ritch

June 1906.

**THE HOUSE
ON THE HUDSON**

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

BY

FRANCES POWELL *Case*
=

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1903

KD11503



**COPYRIGHT, 1908, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS**

Published, March, 1908

**TROW DIRECTORY
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY
NEW YORK**

**THE HOUSE
ON THE HUDSON**

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I

"Do you see this ring?"

*What of it? 'Tis a figure, a symbol, say;
A thing's sign: now for the thing signified."*

*"Some lapidary, in a narrow home of
European cities, had perhaps spent his prime upon the precious
toil, cutting it by dawn and sunset, and retouching it at starlight."*

"I repeat it, Mrs. Derohan, I repeat it," cried Lord Ebbrides, his usually well-modulated voice high and harsh through irritation. "Every man, woman, and child has their price!"

"Bad grammar—and a false creed," said my mother.

Lord Ebbrides's angry tones attracted the attention of my mother's other guests, who filled almost to overflowing the narrow strip of garden in front of our tall French villa, and they ceased their own gay chatter to listen.

"I'll back my opinion to any amount, Mrs. Derohan. You can buy——"

But he was interrupted by a clamor of voices. Everybody had an opinion and gave it loudly. Everybody talked, nobody listened. I, least of the company, was unconscious that I did either, being absorbed in watching my fat puppy, "Prince Hal," gobble up a saucerful of bread and cream; but, after

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

the odd manner of children, I later remembered what had been said.

Presently the pretty girl who presided over the tea-table made her shrill voice dominate all others. "Grown people may be as horrid as that," she cried, "but not children."

The tumult died away and the Viscount Ebbrides was heard to say that children were a rotten lot; greedy, time-serving, deceitful;—as bad as their elders and as easily bought. Another babel followed this trenchant announcement, then I heard my name.

"Look at little Athena! Look at the little golden-haired angel's great, steadfast gray eyes, and dare to say——"

I gathered up my over-fed pup and walked away to the end of the garden. There, in the tall trees of our boundary line, I found another house-party engaged in shrill discussion. These were magpies, in quaint suits of pepper-and-salt. They did not talk of my looks—a tiresome, never-ending topic—but politely ignored my existence and turned a deaf ear to the sharp yaps of Prince Hal.

Although it was but May, splendid roses clambered up the brick walls of the villa, and summer had come. The villa had been rented for a month that my mother might rest before the London season, but it was crammed with people, as she disliked being dull. The French coast pleased her near Dinard. Its fields of cardinal-colored clover against a background of blue sky, the little waves dancing about the myriads of golden-brown islets off shore, the days of brilliant sunshine, suited her. She found the place gay and she loved gayety—of every kind. We had no settled home, but flitted from place to place, rarely pitching our tent anywhere for longer than two months. My mother had had

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

but a dreary girlhood—teaching music all the year round in a country town—and after her marriage she indulged her fancy for society and for constant change. My father shared her tastes and was equally fond of living in Europe, until the Civil War began. Then he wished to return home and fight for the preservation of the Union—the question of slavery did not interest him—but my mother would not let him go. This was very natural. She was not only delicate and tender-hearted, dreading the horrors of war, but quite alone in the world—an orphan, with the memory of relatives who had snubbed her when she was poor.

So my father remained abroad and they wandered far a-field, perhaps to be out of hearing of home echoes. When they were in Athens I was born, and they named me for that city and its tutelary goddess. During my childhood I heard nothing of home politics, but much of Athena; nothing of the rights and wrongs of North and South, or of the miseries arising out of the negro question, but much of the wisdom and strength that must be acquired by a little girl who bore the name of a great and good goddess. Unfortunately, I was but a humdrum child.

My poor mother declared that I had a taste for the commonplace, even preferring plain-looking, commonplace people. This was because of my affection for Percy Stuart, a good-tempered young Englishman who, like his cousin, Lord Ebbrides, spent most of his time in our everchanging homes. Although he was over twenty, and I but eight years old that May, he never teased me, but always treated me with the consideration due a sensible and much-liked companion. So I was much pleased on that May afternoon when he joined me in my end of the garden.

“Have you been to St. Malo, Percy?”

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"No, Athena."

"Then where have you been? Listen to the sea; how it is singing!"

He paid no attention. I stared at him, wondering.

"Athena," he burst out after a moment, "is there anything that you want most awfully?"

"Yes," I said without hesitation, "I want a doll."

I had never had a doll. Even the poor make-shift of a towel with a string tied around its middle, and pencilled face, was denied me. I possessed but two toys—a racing-stable with its stud, and a beautifully rigged schooner-yacht. With these I seldom cared to play; indeed, I had but little time for playing. What with studying wise books all the mornings of the year, and learning to ride, swim, box, fence, or shoot every afternoon, playtime was crowded out. Yet I wanted a doll, and fearing Percy had not heard me I repeated what I had said.

"Yes, Percy, I do wish for a doll most awfully!"

He turned on his heel abruptly and left me, muttering as he went:

"I feel a Judas!"

Presently my mother called to me. She had left her *chaise longue*, and I knew, because of the great brilliancy of her eyes, that she was excited over something.

"Athena," she cried as I drew near, "Athena, my little goddess, pray say you do not want a doll."

I could not say so. I remained silent. The curiosity of the company was aroused as to why I might not wish for one. Everybody demanded the reason. I wished to know, too.

"Because I don't choose to have what is called the maternal instinct awakened in my daughter," said my mother, scornfully. "Maternal instinct, forsooth! Say rather the nurse-maid instinct! No, my beautiful Athena shall never care to weary herself

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

with domestic miseries if I can prevent it. Therefore I banish dolls."

"But if she marries?" someone asked.

"I hope she may never marry." My mother's sweet voice was less silky than usual. "Thank God, she will never need to. She will be lovely, rich, and free as air! I hope she may never wear galling chains—my little Queen of Hearts!" Stooping, she kissed my cheek.

Lord Ebbrides was rolling a cigarette. He eyed my mother curiously for a few moments, then said, indifferently:

"So our bet is off?"

My mother liked a wager. She hesitated. At last she said, very slowly:

"N—o; I suppose you may try. It can do no harm."

Two days passed. On the evening of the third Nurse Margaret, a hard-featured, soft-hearted old Scotch body, had just tucked me in bed when my mother came in. She was wrapped in a white peignoir and evidently about to dress for dinner. Her hair, already arranged, was ornamented with a spray of fine emeralds. As she came toward me, smiling, her splendid eyes and the great jewels in her fair curls seemed to flash and sparkle in unison. I gazed adoringly up at her as she bent above me, but, as usual, said nothing. Words come to my lips with no more readiness when I am deeply moved than at any other time.

My mother bade me say my prayers and I obeyed, repeating the same prayer in Greek, Latin, German, French, and Italian. She was pleased, while I, I wondered if the Lord God were not a-weary of these "vain repetitions." Did He think me a very tiresome child?

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Meanwhile, my mother continued putting me through my paces.

"When I say, 'The Hand of Douglas is his own,' what do I mean, darling?"

"That my lips belong to me," I answered, docilely, charmed to have her with me, "and I need not kiss anyone unless I choose, but I must refuse politely, making a civil excuse, even if I tell a fib. Society fibs don't count as sins, being but White Lies, meaning—" Here I broke off. "Shall you wear all your emeralds to-night, mamma?"

"Only a few, Athena." And my mother went on to tell how, some day, I was to have her collection of these green gems—it was said to be unrivalled—some day when I should be a young lady and she—an old one. As she kissed me good-night she bade me never forget the meaning of "The Hand of Douglas."

"When I raise my hand—so—Athena," lifting her hand as she spoke; but a burst of jolly laughter cut her short as my father entered the room. Catching her around the waist he shook her playfully.

"Is this fair play, wicked girl?" he cried. "Creeping into the favorite's stall and slipping a powder in among her oats!"

I sat up in bed, wide awake and eager, but Margaret, asking angrily if they wished to keep "the bairn fra' her night's sleep wi' their daffin?" turned them out and shut the door. The following morning, Sunday—when no wearisome lessons were to be learned—my mother told me that I might accept, if I wished, the next doll offered me. Many had I been obliged to decline. I think I never was happier in my life than at that moment. "Perhaps some one may give me a doll on Christmas," I hazarded.

"Perhaps," said my mother, "who can say?"

In every odd moment I thought of that doll.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Christmas was a long way off, but the pleasure of anticipation was already mine, and I had a large store of patience to draw upon.

On Friday afternoon of that week I found Percy Stuart waiting to accompany me on my daily ride. As he swung me into my saddle Lord Ebbrides called to him to wait a moment. My high-spirited mare—I had long outgrown ponies—refused to stand, and I rode on. As Percy rejoined me he called back to his cousin irritably:

"Yes, yes, I said I'd be back in time, but for the rest of your beastly plot manage it yourself—and be hanged to you!"

"You don't like him, either, do you, Percy?" I said, very sorry for my friend because of the cousinship.

"Not very much. Why doesn't he please you, Athena?"

I had been taught that Derohans were never tell-tales, and that the great Minerva was not a gossiping goddess. But I had been instructed as well that a gentlewoman was always civil—even greeting Death politely when he called. To be strictly truthful, yet polite, was sometimes, I found—for I disliked white lies—extremely difficult. Percy's question posed me. At last I said:

"He has the Evil Eye."

Percy burst out laughing and exclaimed, "Oh, bosh!"

I thought him rude, and he, realizing that he had been so, quickly apologized. I then explained further. "Some people, Percy, have the Evil Eye and can't help it."

"Like being born with a squint," he suggested.

"Yes. Poor people! It makes them unhappy, Percy. When they find it out they try to live alone."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Hermits," said Percy. "I've often read about 'em."

"Lord Ebbrides is not that kind," I went on, "but he may not know he has it, Margaret says."

"He certainly is not an old-style anchorite."

I looked earnestly at my companion. Was he taking the matter seriously? His expression was grave, even solemn.

"Percy?"

"Yes, Athena."

"I think Lord Ebbrides has the Evil Eye, and knows he has, and enjoys having it!"

"It's as plain as the nose on your face," said Percy, soberly, "which is a vulgar expression and you mustn't use it, Athena."

I said I would not, and fell to thinking of Lord Ebbrides—of the kindness he showed me in public, of the small torments he inflicted when no one was near. Often I dreaded going from my nursery to the drawing-room, knowing he might be lurking behind some half-open door, or crouching in some dark corner ready to pounce upon me as I passed.

"Now, then, little Minerva," he would whisper as he caught me, "how many kisses am I to have? Not one? Oh, but I'll help myself! Where's your owl, wise goddess? What, no helmet! No spear to hurl! Why don't you arm yourself or cry out for help? I know why. Because you love me, though you pretend you don't."

This last taunt rankled, and he knew it, as he also knew that I would not tell or cry for aid, while, well aware of my skill with my fists, he held my arms close clasped at my sides, avoiding punishment.

"He is a scoundrel," I said to myself. Then our horses broke into a run and I forgot Lord Ebbrides.

My father was waiting to lift me from the saddle when we got home. He bade me run upstairs and

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

be dressed quickly, as I was wanted in the drawing-room. Storm-signals were so plainly visible in the nursery that I did not ask questions, but hurried down to the drawing-room as I had been bidden. There, all our guests were assembled. As I entered the conversation stopped abruptly, and my mother slipped from the room. My father came to meet me. He patted my cheek fondly as he said:

"I told you to be quick, Athena, because a beautiful present has come for you." And he led me to a small table placed in the middle of the room. I looked, and looked again. I could hardly believe my eyes. There, close before me, lay the most exquisite doll I had ever seen, and my father said it was for me!

A doll with flaxen hair and blue eyes—in a frock of white lace over a blue silk slip! Beside her stood her trunk, wide open, disclosing her dainty wardrobe. And this angel was for me! Wide-eyed and solemn I gazed in rapture at my treasure, forgetting that I was not alone. The sound of Lord Ebbrides's voice roused me. Glancing up I saw him standing opposite me at the other side of the table.

"See, little Athena," he smiled as he spoke—I did not like his smile—"here is a doll from Paris—a gay little lady. Will you accept her from me?"

The Viscount Ebbrides was considered handsome, because of his black eyes and hair, and his wonderful complexion, which did much to relieve the coarseness of his features. He was of medium height, broad-shouldered, and very strong. His love of sport recommended him to my father, whose intimate friend he was. As I looked at him across the table I thought him the ugliest man in the world, and, so thinking, forgot to answer his question. I turned to seek my father. He had vanished. Percy Stuart was nowhere to be seen. I suddenly felt very much

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

alone. The silence of the people crowded about me weighed my spirits down.

"Look! See all the pretty things Dolly has to wear!" Lord Ebbrides was again speaking. "All for you, my beautiful little playmate."

"Thank you."

I spoke with chill civility. I did not offer to touch the doll. Very lately I had read of the deceitful mirage of the desert. The doll, I thought sadly, was a mirage—nothing more.

"Do you really want a doll, Athena?"

"More than anything in the world, Lord Ebbrides."

"Then take this one"—he took her up and tried to place her in my arms—"and give me a kiss in return."

As he advanced I retreated.

"Why do you wish to give me a doll when you don't like me?" I asked.

At this there was much laughter among the spectators.

Lord Ebbrides looked displeased. Then one of the men present—men were always greatly in the majority in our house-parties—spoke rather sharply:

"Give her a plain answer, Ebbrides. You can't expect a child to understand innuendoes. I vote for fair play."

A murmur of approval followed. Lord Ebbrides's brow darkened still more, but he paid no attention to the speaker.

"I love you dearly, Athena," he said, "and I want you to love me in return. That is why I sent for this doll. Take her, and give me, in return, twelve kisses every day, six in the morning and six at night. Come, is it a bargain?"

Alas! at that moment I forgot my daily lessons on politeness, forgot that the Recording Angel was understood to overlook Society Fibs, forgot every-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

thing, in short, that I should have remembered, and spoke my mind:

"I would rather never have a doll than take one from you."

"Why?"

A quick-witted child might have evaded a direct answer. Even I, remembering that he was my father's friend and guest, might, I now think, have replied civilly. But I was deeply moved, and so told the rough truth, saying, quietly:

"Because you are a coward and a liar."

Making my little reverence to the company, I walked proudly from the room.

Once out of the house I ran, trying to escape from the strange sensations of grief, loneliness, and resentment that filled my heart to bursting. Like a wounded animal I sought blindly for a hiding-place, and might have fled far had not Percy Stuart caught me as I rushed through the gate. As he lifted me in his kind arms and carried me back into the house and to his own room, I burst into a bitter flood of tears.

"There, there," whispered the good-hearted young man as he placed me in an easy-chair, "you needn't say a word, Athena. I understand." And he muttered, "Butchered to make a Roman holiday!"

His sympathy did more to restore my peace of mind than the splendid doll he presently took from its box and laid in my arms.

"Tell you what it is, Athena," he said, cheerfully, "two can play at every game, and this I've won. You and I have come out ahead, haven't we, in spite of Evil Eyed Anchorites?" I thought we had.

Lord Ebbrides, pleading a business engagement, left for London the next day. I had been the cause of his losing a great deal of money, as I had been heavily backed to win. He had to endure, as well,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

much chaffing from the men and reproaches from the women.

On our way to London we stopped in Paris where, with her winnings, my mother bought herself a ring, an antique intaglio. In the gem, a large emerald of great beauty, was carved the bust of a winged woman—a Psyche, the jeweler said. The face was exquisite, its expression one of sadness so intense as to seem severe. The emerald was set in diamonds that never ceased sparkling—so I thought. At first, because it reminded me of past pain, I disliked the ring. Later, because of the rare beauty of the face in the emerald's heart, I learned to love it well. My mother wore it constantly, always on the fourth finger of her right hand.

II

Nurse Margaret read but three books: the Bible, Burns's Poems, and Uncle Tom's Cabin. This last I was never permitted to read, but I knew its few illustrations well, and because of the one where Eliza was shown crossing the river on the ice-blocks, her child in her arms, my doll lost her looks. I was not told Eliza's story, nor that she was not white. Nurse merely said that she was a brave woman, saving her child from worse than death. So later in the summer, when stopping near Baden-Baden—a favorite halting-place with my parents, the gaming-tables not being suppressed until nearly two years after—a convenient brook being, unluckily, at hand, I must needs play Eliza's part.

With big stepping-stones for cakes of ice, Prince Hal and two dachshunds for bloodhounds, I started across. My foot slipping, I fell in, and Percette Stuart Derohan was submerged. When she was rescued and thoroughly dried her complexion was gone, and her flaxen curls came out in spots. My mother, shocked by her ugliness, begged me to throw her away; then suggested a new head. But to me Percette was—Percette. I insisted that she should remain as she was.

"Should you cease to love me, mamma," I asked, "if I had the small-pox and grew ugly?"

I can never forget the pallor that overspread my mother's lovely face at this, or the shudder that she could not repress as she told me not to suggest so

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

great a calamity. She had an exquisite nature, a pure and tender soul. Rough thoughts hurt her.

Poor Percette! I kept her only two years. We were in England visiting friends who lived in a grand old castle—much celebrated in song and story—when I lost her. Several children were of this house-party, and royalty condescended to be present. A few days before our departure we children lunched with our elders in the great dining-hall, whose walls were panelled from floor to ceiling in white and gold. I thought that my mother in her gown of pale green muslin, covered with a net-work of wonderful embroidery, a rope of pearls around her throat, was the most beautiful woman present. His Royal Highness agreed with me, apparently, for he joined her as she entered the deep-set window of the cedar drawing-room—so called because of the carvings in that wood around windows and doors—and began paying her graceful compliments. But my mother pouted.

"I feel cross, and disappointed," she said, complaining that I would not talk or be gay like the little Lady Gladys Trevor, whose witticisms had kept the table in a roar of laughter. I, meanwhile, looked from the window to the river, gray and sluggish, sliding slimily past far, far below (for the castle stood with its feet in the water), and felt ashamed.

The Prince was kind, trying to comfort my mother by praises of my beauty, admiring my level eyebrows and fair hair.

"Curiously enough, I feel that I must have met the child before," he said at length; "her face is strangely familiar to me—yet I never forget a name. I confess I am puzzled."

My mother smiled. An odd, far-away look came into her dark eyes.

"My Athena is a Greek, Monseigneur," she said,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

dreamily, "and her kinsfolk—marble people—are to be met with in the great art galleries of the world."

The poor gentleman looked bewildered, but, kissing my cheek, bade me run away and play.

In the court-yard—where screaming peacocks had supplanted the old-time pages and men-at-arms—Gladys waited for me. In her arms she held Percette with respectful care, while she dangled her own doll carelessly by what she called its "hind-leg." Sighing with relief, she relinquished Percette to my keeping.

"She's a care!" she said. "Not because of her face, which is most awfully knocked up, but because of your embroidery on her frock. Mamma says she never saw such needlework—says the flowers look real enough to smell sweet—says she wonders you could do 'em—says you're such a stupid little thing. Oh, Athena! I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to say that—it just slipped out. Please forgive me."

I had nothing to forgive. She had spoken the simple truth.

We stopped on a stretch of greensward that topped a steep bank above the river. Here a dolls' *fête-champêtre* was soon in full swing. All the children had brought all their dolls. It was like a real party, we decided. Such a crowd! Thinking ourselves well concealed from castle and flower-gardens by a screen of young larches, our dismay was great when a young Frenchman, whom we detested, bounced suddenly into our very midst. Grinning with delight over our evident terror, he stood in the centre of our green ball-room seeking a prey. A doll, a wall-flower for the nonce, was sitting out the dance. Her he seized, and began to spring about in a strange and alarming manner.

"La-la-la," sang the sallow-faced little dandy, gayly pirouetting and bounding high in air. "*Tiens,*

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I go to dance the can-can to make amusement to the *petites demoiselles Anglaises!*"

The doll was Percette. First, she was held by an arm, then a leg, next by her waist, and all the time so banged and whirled about that each moment I feared to hear her stitches give, to see the air filled with her sawdust insides. All tried to rescue her in vain—he eluded us with fiendish dexterity. Suddenly our hopes rose. Monsieur le Marquis ceased leaping up and down. Picking up a doll's table, made of iron, he fastened it to Percette's sash and sprang to the top of the bank overhanging the river.

"You reely wish, *très chère* Ateena, to me separate from this your lofely child?"

"Oh, please give her to me!" I entreated, running toward him.

With a mocking laugh he lifted Percette high in air, and calling out, "She say *jamais*, nevare! Better ze death than ze life wizout me," flung her into the middle of the stream, then stood stock-still, staring stupidly at the spot where she had disappeared.

Before Percette touched the water I was down the bank and tearing off my shoes; as she sank I struck out to her assistance. But the little table held her down, the river bottom was muddy, and dive as I would I could not find her. My father came in time to pull me out before I was drowned, but not before my strength was exhausted, for to give up what should be achieved is a heart-breaking matter, and—I loved Percette.

It was Lady Gladys who had run for my father. It was Lady Gladys who, roused to wrath by the sight of the evil-doer standing idle on the bank, rushed upon him with such furious onslaught that her child's push sent him toppling into the river. There, amid rough sedges, in but two feet of water, the Marquis

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

splashed about in real terror, believing himself to be drowning.

The gay crowd from the flower-garden, where Gladys had found my father, had followed to the river and now greeted with mocking laughter the piteous cries of the French bully. None lent him aid. He scrambled out, and slunk homeward alone. But to me they were very kind. I tried to thank them, but could not. Percette was dead.

"Never mind, darling," cried my mother, helping Nurse Margaret wrap me in shawls brought in haste from the castle, "I will get you a new Percette."

"Percette? What an odd name!" exclaimed a sympathetic bystander.

"Yes, named for young Stuart," someone explained. "Awfully sad about him, isn't it? Good-hearted chap."

"What about him?" asked the other.

"Dead. Hadn't you heard? Crushed by the roof falling in at the Shaws's fire. You had not? Why, it was all in the papers. Whole house gone—pictures, furniture, jewels, laces—Lady Shaws had a stunning lot of lace; showed it me once. Well, it's all gone now. Young Stuart? Oh, yes! Well, he went in after the youngest boy's dog, a collie. They say the howls of the creature turned you sick and the boy, lame you know, insisted on going back for it, so Stuart went. There, don't let's talk about it—crushed to death, and so young. They say the crowd worked like devils to get him out—why, look at that child! Athena, what is it, dear?"

I did not answer. A great black wave seemed to roar above, around me. I lost consciousness.

I never owned another doll. I did not wish for one. Percy was dead, and his gift, Percette. I turned my face away when people, meaning to be

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

kind, offered to replace her, seeming not to realize that the place of the dead may never be filled. Nurse Margaret, learning that Lord Ebbrides was heir to Percy's large fortune, mourned openly over the strange ways of Providence.

"The flow'r ta'en," she complained, "the weed left to flourish!"

Poor nurse! A year later she was sent back to Scotland, and I had a French maid. I missed my Margaret sadly.

We had a house in Paris the May I was thirteen—a large house, that my mother might entertain. The ball-room was very splendid, and my mother's boudoir resembled a *bonbonnière* with its frescoed ceiling and hangings of green satin. In it was an armoire that I thought beautiful. It was of oak, the tall mirror of its door supported on either hand by a nymph or dryad, whose diaphanous drapery, clinging closely to her graceful limbs, was drawn, where it floated free, just above the head, by an upcurved arm. From under these veils each sister looked forth upon you as if, well-knowing the past, she might foretell the future. They fascinated me, and I felt that the sad-eyed dryads were the guardians of my mother's emeralds, since she kept them on the upper shelf of the armoire.

Her collection grew each year. My father's income had yearly increased since, his former man of affairs dying, our fortune had been placed in the hands of a brisk young lawyer. Then, too, Lord Ebbrides added many gems to my mother's store. These she disliked accepting, for she could not esteem him and realized, I feel sure, that they were given only because of his friendship for her husband. Lord Ebbrides was with us always—he and my father had become inseparable. That May he had apartments in our neighborhood and we saw him daily.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Although my old nurse, Scotch Margaret, was very superstitious, she had failed to imbue me with her quaint beliefs, and I state but a plain fact when I say that misfortunes have generally befallen me in the month of May, and always on a Friday. It was on a Friday afternoon when, crossing the hall to dress for my daily ride, I met my father, his cheerful, high-colored face so drawn with pain that I feared he was dying.

"Papa!" I cried, running to him, "what is it? Are you ill?"

For answer he caught me in his arms.

"My poor little daughter!" he groaned, "my beautiful, helpless little child!" and staggered as if he would have fallen.

Just then the door of the boudoir—on the floor above—opened, and I heard my mother's musical laugh.

"In that case I might," she said in sweet, low tones; "but now a truce to your folly—*cela m'ennuie*."

My father's heavy sigh echoed through the hall. Startled by the sound, my mother came to the head of the staircase, behind her Lord Ebbrides.

"Hurry, mamma!" I cried. "Papa is very ill."

Slowly, as if deprived of her strength, she descended the stairs. Lord Ebbrides would have supported her, but she thrust him away.

"Oh, Millicent, Millicent!"—my father's voice was hoarse and strange—"that damned scoundrel—I trusted him!"

"Go away, Athena," said my mother, in a fierce whisper. "Go to your room and—be silent."

Without a word I obeyed.

It was, indeed, a great calamity that had broken my father down. His fortune was gone, lost in mad

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

speculation. I feel sure that for himself ruin would have mattered little, but the thought of wife and child reduced to penury—a mere pittance remained to us—wrung his heart. To a vigorous young creature like myself poverty meant little, but, like my father, I dreaded it for my sensitive mother. She bore the blow bravely, making no complaint, though each day her lovely face grew more haggard, her great eyes more feverishly bright.

Lord Ebbrides placed his purse at my father's disposal for immediate expenses. As soon as possible, everything of value was to go under the hammer, save the emeralds. These Lord Ebbrides offered to buy. This sale was particularly bitter to my father. It was an additional blow to deprive my mother of her jewels, and for that reason, perhaps, he was eager to have them go at once. It was on the last Friday in May that, entering the green boudoir, I heard him ask if they had been sent to Lord Ebbrides. My mother answering in the negative, he showed displeasure. "I grudge them to him, of course," he said, irritably, "but he's paid up handsomely, Millicent, and I wish to God you'd give 'em to him and be done with it."

"As you please, Charles," she answered, coldly. "Is he to have the ring, too?" half-drawing the intaglio from her finger.

"No, no! Not Athena's Psyche—God forbid!"

He hurried from the room.

My mother lay back among the pale green cushions of her sofa, staring with sombre eyes at the flashing jewels on her finger. Her golden hair gleamed like sunshine, a red spot burned on either cheek. She was surpassingly beautiful. Presently she became aware of my steady gaze.

"Well," she said, a note of contempt in her voice, "are you discovering the worm?"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"The worm, mamma?"

"Yes, the nasty, crawling, evil worm! That's what is left when the butterfly's wings are pulled off." With a dreary laugh she rose and surveyed herself in the armoire's mirror. "I see it plainly," she continued, "for, thank God—or the Devil—I have never blinked plain facts. Come here, Athena, stand beside me—so. Now look well at those two reflections and learn a lesson in physiognomy. Ah! I am grown a hag already—in two short weeks!"

"Short weeks?" I echoed thoughtfully. "They seem years!"

"Athena! Is it possible you feel that way? But no, like all children, you only repeat what others say. You resemble a statue—like a statue, will rest content forever in some dusty, out-of-the-way niche! I—like my kind—need warmth, sunshine, flowers! I must have them. Well for you that you care for nothing, since nothing is left you to care for! Poverty is like death."

I remember I flung my arms around her, crying out, in a very passion of love and pity, that while I had her I had everything, everything—that to purchase her happiness I would gladly die!

"Then hold me close, Athena, do not let me go!" she spoke breathlessly, clinging to me as if in terror, "while you are near me——"

"A note for Madame."

Julie, my mother's maid, stood in the doorway, disapproval in her hard, dark eyes.

"A voice from the Pit!" said my mother, laughing hysterically. "Well, agent of the Devil, what does your master want?"

Julie was handsome—tall, dark, imposing. In the Reign of Terror she might have led a mob. She stood before her mistress erect and calm, holding

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

out the note. My mother put both hands behind her and stepped back.

"I shall not touch it, Julie."

"Is it, then, to be returned, Madame?"

"Wait—" cried my mother. "If I only knew what to do! Who was it, Athena, that was pursued by Death and the Devil?"

"Sintram, mamma."

"Poor creature! If I could but decide——"

"Perhaps with a coin," suggested Julie.

"The very thing!" Taking from her purse a ten-franc piece my mother called out, "Heads, Death! Tails, the Devil!" and tossed it high in air.

It fell with a soft rustle on the gay rug at her feet. She knelt to examine it. The glitter of fierce excitement gleamed in Julie's eyes. Slowly, very slowly, my mother rose, her face ghastly white. She stretched out her hand for the letter.

"Go, Athena," she said.

"Yes, but first let me kiss you, mamma."

"No, no!" she cried, shrinking back. "Don't touch me, don't come near me!"

Seeing that her nerves were on edge I went quietly away. When, at midnight, a frightful storm broke over the city, waking me, I remembered my mother's excited condition, and could not sleep because of my anxiety until the noises of the tempest died away. She breakfasted always in her room, and when she failed to appear at luncheon I believed that she was but taking a much-needed rest, and felt no alarm. Neither was my father uneasy until Julie, pale-faced and wild-eyed, startled us.

"The door of the boudoir has been locked since daybreak, Monsieur," she cried, entering unannounced. "Perhaps Madame is ill!"

Fearing we knew not what, we hurried upstairs. My father knocked softly at the door.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Millicent!"

No answer. In the silence I could hear my heart beat. Again—knocking loudly, peremptorily—

"Millicent! Millicent! Open the door!" entreatingly—violently—despairingly. Then, to the huddled group of frightened servants: "Stand back, damn you! Can't you do something besides stare? Athena, can you hear anything?"

I shook my head.

"Stand aside, then," he commanded hoarsely, and, driving his shoulder against the door, broke it down. It crashed, splintering, inward. He covered his face with his hands. "I can't do it!" he whispered, and—I entered. The atmosphere was close, tainted with the odor of a dying night-lamp. When, groping my way to a window, I flung it wide and looked about me, I thought the room empty. But the armoire had fallen forward. It was flat upon the floor, its door, the great mirror, showing to one side and cracked from end to end. I ran forward, strove to lift it. The servants came to my aid. Underneath lay my mother—dead.

She wore a travelling dress. Beside her was the small bag in which the emeralds were carried when we moved. Some were in it, others scattered about the floor. Her right hand, palm outward, was pressed close against her mouth. When, tenderly lifting the beautiful head I pillowed it on my breast, her hand slipped aside, and I saw upon her lips the imprint of the intaglio.

One of the many doctors, summoned in vain, returned the next day to talk with me, an old man, with beetling eyebrows and a mane of iron-gray hair.

"Thy mother, dear child," he said, gently, "had lost her mind. Had she lived she would have been parted from thee—always. Thy sorrow is, then, truly a blessing. See, it was like this. The storm

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

came. She arose, imagining she was to make a journey. She seeks her jewels—in the armoire. As she draws them from the shelf she feels it totter, lifts her hand quickly to push it back, but—it falls! The hand against the shelf's edge is forced down upon her face, and the ring— Ah! this is the ring upon thy small right hand? It is permitted—yes?"

He drew it from my finger, and, taking a small magnifying glass from his pocket, examined it closely.

"A Psyche, Monsieur," I faltered, as my tears flowed fast.

The old man shook his head.

"*Mais non, mais non!*" he cried, with sudden imperiousness. "The Psyche wears butterfly wings, while these—" he transferred his gaze from the emerald to me, was silent for a long moment, then said, quietly: "This is—Nemesis!"

III

My father was never the same again. The loss of fortune had tried him, but if my mother had lived he might have become his old genial self once more. Without her, however, life lost its charm. Only the necessity of caring for me prevented him from killing himself. This he frankly acknowledged. Lord Ebbrides, his sworn friend, deserted him. Perhaps Charles Derohan poor proved too dull a companion for so gay a man. Lord Ebbrides neither came to my mother's funeral nor expressed sympathy for us in our sorrow. He left Paris at once, and my father never saw him again. Cray, his valet and confidential man, came for the emeralds and—married Julie. My father gave her a handsome dot, though he could ill spare the money.

"She served your mother faithfully, Athena," he said.

Our house in Paris was given up and my father, before sailing for New York, placed me in the care of a melancholy French lady who lived in the country. He had hoped to retrieve his shattered fortunes, but his efforts met with no success. He was not fitted for business. Poverty, the necessity of asking favors, broke him down. When I went to him, ten months later, he had grown an old man.

I was fourteen when I first saw the flat, green meadows and gray dunes of Long Island. I love the eastern end of that strange length of sand better than any place on earth. In an old gray farm-house,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

half a mile from the sea, we set up housekeeping. For five years, winter and summer, I lived there, often quite alone, but too busy to be lonely, as I took entire charge of the house. I grew proud of my skill in cooking. My cake was in demand at the village fairs.

My father spent most of his time, and all his money, in Wall Street. He took no comfort in being with me, realizing too keenly the change in my position. He was pleased when I learned to launch the fishermen's dory through a high surf, to understand the weather signs and the management of crops; rejoiced that my complexion stood wind and weather, and sighed because, disliking the noise of firearms and taking the lives of birds, I refused to go shooting. He predicted that I should lose my skill.

Boxing I was not allowed to forget. Prize-fights still aroused his enthusiasm, and when one came off he read me every detail from his sporting-paper. If he returned from town in a happy mood he always renewed my lessons, calling me to the barn where they took place. Thankful to give him pleasure, I tucked up my long braids, rolled up my sleeves, and drew on the gloves with feigned zest.

The barn was a pleasant place to loiter in, smelling sweet of the hay that Mr. Welborn, our landlord, stored there. But on the broad floor I found a square chalked out—the ring, in fighting parlance—and there was no loitering for me! Sometimes, because of the swallows and pigeons circling past the wide-flung doors, the sunshine checking the dusty floor, the cadence of waves on the distant shore, I would grow dreamy, forget myself, and so get a fall! Again, my father forgot that his adversary was his daughter and I, remembering, fell again. I did not mind the bruises, but boxing is an unwomanly exercise, and this I often hinted.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Nonsense, Athena!" he would cry, indignantly. "No woman is the worse for understanding the art, the noble art, of self-defence! Say you met a tramp, would you run away screaming? Or become helpless through terror if you saw he meant mischief? Not much," chuckling, "not much, my dear! You'd simply play for his head, smartly, with your left, hitting straight. Or, better still, if you could manage it—mind what I'm saying, Athena—give him two hard rights over the heart, driving him back, then send a straight left to the neck and—you'll have him guessing in no time!" Sighing, he would add, "If you'd only let yourself go, not be so infernally anxious to spare your old dad hard knocks, you'd daze me, have me helpless straight off! Few men could get the better of you, my girl, though you look so dainty. What you lack in weight you make up for in skill. Your style's perfect, if I say it who shouldn't! You're supple as an Indian, your grip is iron, your muscles steel. Tell you what, my slender goddess, you'll do!"

But moments of contentment—when he rejoiced in my strength—were rare. The thought of my nun-like existence harried him perpetually since he wished to see me launched in the gay world. My nineteenth birthday was approaching fast when, bent upon making money for me, he took the small sum he had in hand and went up to town. He was absent some time. When he returned he looked startlingly ill.

"I'm all right," he said in answer to my questions; "for God's sake, don't badger me!"

But he could not eat, and later I heard him pacing his room, up and down, up and down, till he came back to me and said, his eyes averted, his voice low and husky:

"Athena, I must raise money on the ring. Put

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

it in my room. I go back to town early to-morrow."

"Nemesis?" I cried. "Oh, papa!"

He turned upon me fiercely as if about to speak harshly, then his expression changed to one of feeble bewilderment.

"It's got to go," he muttered, "got to go! Put it in my room."

After my mother's death he had given it me, the only jewel remaining us, and to me the emerald with its Nemesis was no trinket, but a live thing. Parting with it was bitter. I opened the case and looked long at the gem—it was less brilliant than usual; then, in memory of my mother, pressed my lips against the intaglio. It was, I thought, my last farewell. Going softly to my father's room I placed the case, still open, on the table by his bed.

At midnight a great cry rang through the house: "Millicent, Millicent, Millicent!"

Swiftly as I answered it, I could give no help, since, wild with fever, my father did not know me. The sight of the ring seemed driving him mad. As I caught it up I wondered that I had thought the gem grown dull, for it blazed with fierce, green light from the midst of its diamonds.

My father was very ill for two weeks—at the last peaceful and quite happy. He had forgotten his troubles, and become as a little child. I laid him to rest in the graveyard of the tiny hamlet, near which we had lived so long. This was his wish—the last I was able to gratify. Then I turned to face the world—alone.

.

During their years of wandering my parents had made few friends. These few were foreigners—they had avoided their compatriots. My mother disliked

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

her kinsfolk—who had ill-treated her—and never spoke of them. My father often told me that I had no “kith nor kin.” When he left me there was no one either to share my grief, or, save for kind neighbors, hold out a friendly hand. I knew I must support myself, and this knowledge held no terrors for me, but when I opened my father’s desk to find its pigeon-holes stuffed with unpaid bills, my heart sank within me.

It was a lovely morning in May, but I sat like a stone before the old-fashioned secretary, unconscious of the beauty of the outside world. I stared from the window without seeing the stretch of fresh, green meadows, the blue waters sparkling in the sunshine, or the spray of apple-blossoms tapping gayly against the pane. I saw only a mountain of debt, and realized, with a sharp pain at my heart, that for the past four years we had lived upon charity. I knew that had my father lived he would have paid in full, but—did his creditors understand? A firm knock at the door startled me to my feet, and I turned to face the chief among them, our landlord, Mr. Welborn.

They were his unpaid bills that I still held in my hand. He saw them, and, taking them from me, vanished with them into the kitchen. I followed in time to see them thrust into the stove. Refusing to listen to my remonstrances, to my eager assurances that I had money with which to pay my debts—Nemesis remained to me—he insisted that I should make my home under his roof until I saw fit to leave the island.

It was noon when he left me. I went to the barn-yard to feed the poultry, my heart almost light again, through the fresh courage instilled by the splendid generosity of this kind friend. But where might I find a purchaser for the ring? The crisp

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

sea-breeze blowing back my hair, the soft May sunshine, the sweet May scents, brought me comfort, but no solution to this difficulty. It was hard to puzzle my brains, in the sudden reaction that had come with the knowledge of the world's kindness.

I tossed a handful of corn into the air for my doves. The chickens, rushing pell-mell from every direction, crowded about my feet, scolding, pushing, gobbling—a greedy lot! The pigeons, appearing less so because of their beauty, flashed and whirled about me in the sunshine, alighting now on my shoulders, now on my outstretched arm with soft rustle of furling wings.

Suddenly I heard a step, and, glancing around, saw a town-bred man, of easy carriage, standing by the fence. He was watching my doves with evident admiration, but, when I turned, took off his hat and entered the yard.

“Miss Derohan?”

I bowed.

“I am Richard Thorpe, junior partner in the firm of Beverley and Thorpe,” said the stranger, smiling so pleasantly that I forgot to think him plain-looking.

I bowed again and he looked a trifle embarrassed. I had been expected to know about him and his firm, I saw. Since this failed, he tried again.

“I come from your cousin, Mrs. Spuyten.”

“From Mrs. Spuyten?” I echoed as I led the way into the house. “But I fear you have made a mistake, Mr. Thorpe. I don’t know Mrs. Spuyten, and I have no cousins.”

The situation had grown comical. Mr. Thorpe laughed, but ruefully, then said, “May I ask if you are not the daughter of the late Charles Derohan?”

I bowed.

“Then, I am sorry to say, Mrs. Cornelia de Rohan Spuyten is most certainly your cousin, and I, equally

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

certainly, must deliver a most unpleasant message—one I was very unwilling to have anything to do with. But on junior partners falls the dirty work.”

“Tell me of Mrs. Spuyten first,” I said, trying to make matters easier.

Then I learned that my grandfather had taken a poor orphaned niece to live with him, but, when he died, had failed to provide for her. My generous father had at once settled a large sum of money upon her, that she might be quite independent. She had not been grateful, but had quarrelled with him, and Mr. Thorpe at last gave me to understand that this was because of slighted affection. Cornelia Derohan had loved her handsome young cousin—eight years her junior—and her love had not been returned. Later she had married a rich widower, Mr. Spuyten, who had died a few years before my mother. Mrs. Spuyten, so Mr. Thorpe hinted, again hoped to gain my father’s affection, but failed. She lived in New York with her two step-daughters, and had sent Mr. Thorpe to invite me to spend a week with her—to tell me that she had obtained a position for me, as housekeeper and companion, in a wealthy family, and to hand over to me a cheque for one hundred dollars.

When Mr. Thorpe had placed the slip of paper in my unwilling fingers a silence fell between us which lasted a long time. He stood by the western window, staring into the orchard, an uninviting spot in spite of its gay blossoms. A stout pig, with a contemplative eye, its feet buried in dank earth, luxuriously rubbed its side against the rough bark of a tree, its fellow-pigs rooting and grunting hard by. I envied them as I fought my pride down inch by inch. They need not accept favors from a stranger.

“With regard to that old pig,” Mr. Thorpe began.

“Pig?” I interrupted.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I beg your pardon, I said Mrs. Spuyten."

I smiled.

"Well, never mind if I did say pig, the name suits her. If you should decide to visit her—and all that," waving his hand vaguely, "please remember that she owes you a lot of money."

I shook my head. "What is given is given."

"I don't see it in that light, Miss Derohan. I wish, before you decide upon anything, you'd consult your legal adviser."

"I have none."

Mr. Thorpe's face flushed as he said, eagerly yet a trifle shyly, "I wish you would accept my services, Miss Derohan."

"As adviser?"

"Yes, and lawyer—all that sort of thing. I'm said to understand my business pretty well. Won't you give me a try?"

I liked Mr. Thorpe's frank manner and honest face. He looked good, as well as clever. Mr. Welborn was as ignorant of business matters as I, yet I needed advice. Should I trust this young man? I wished to very much, and I recollected that, whatever my decision, I alone should be involved. If only he were elderly!

"If you don't mind, how old are you?" I asked.

"Twenty-three"—then, seeing my disappointment, "but I'll grow! It's not age that counts, Miss Derohan, but experience, and I've had a great deal," and he smiled. His smile was really charming. Suddenly I remembered that lawyers must be paid. I had not a cent in the world. This I told Mr. Thorpe, and I thanked him for his interest.

"Is it as bad as that, Miss Derohan? I'm awfully sorry. As for paying me—yes, yes," as I would have interrupted him, "I quite understand. I'll send in my bill, never fear, but there's no hurry about it,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

is there? And now, may I go through Mr. Derohan's papers? Unless," stopping short and looking rather haughty, "you prefer trusting them to someone else."

When Mr. Thorpe's task was ended I gave him luncheon. I enjoyed his enjoyment of my omelet—for it was good. When he found I had made it—and the bread—and everything—he seemed annoyed, and gave me no peace till I let him come into the kitchen and wash the dishes! He did it extremely well, and when I praised his dexterity, said he had learned how when camping, and that he was "a dab" at cooking, too!

He had supper and stopped over night at the Welborns', and discussed my affairs with them. He was to dispose of my ring for me, and came for it with Mr. Welborn. As I stood on the old porch saying good-bye to my visitors, I opened the shabby leather-case and looked once more at Nemesis. The moon had just risen, flooding meadow and sea with its light. The air was full of sweet spring scents. From the distant pond came the plaintive cry of a whip-poor-will. It was very lovely, but my heart ached. The circle of diamonds sparkled brilliantly, but the emerald, translucent in the moonlight, gave forth no ray.

IV

The ring was bought by Mr. Thorpe's uncle, Mr. St. John Beverley, a collector of curios. Very wealthy, he was able to give a fancy price, and with this money, added to Mrs. Spuyten's loan, my debts were settled. I never quite understood, although given elaborate explanations, how it was done, since the debts were many and large, but Mr. Welborn assured me that my creditors were satisfied.

A week after Mr. Thorpe's visit, saying good-bye to my friends and to Long Island, I started on my journey into the unknown. It was the first of June—a sad, rainy day, the landscape blurred, the sea sobbing on the shore. The wind sighed through the dark cedars of the tiny grave-yard, but swept gently across the one new-made grave.

The Welborns waited with me on the wet platform of the country station until the train thundered in, when they introduced me to their cousin, the conductor, saying, "Have an eye to her, Sam!" and left me in his charge. He was a kind young man and, meaning to do his duty, bought me all the "Illustrated Weeklies"—so he called them—and countless prize packages of candy. Although grateful, I should have been glad to be quite alone. Not having left home in five years I felt oddly, and the dread of meeting Mrs. Spuyten added to my discomfort. As we drew near New York these disagreeable sensations increased, and it was with a feeling of intense relief that I saw Mr. Thorpe come on board the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

train. He was much surprised to meet me, but took charge of me at once, in his kind way.

"I'd give anything to go with you to Mrs. Spuyten's," he said, as he put me in a cab, "but I think it may be easier for you if you arrive alone. To speak frankly, she's a trying old party—and, in short——"

I held out my hand to say good-bye. I thought I understood—I did not in the least—and I told him I should get on nicely.

"May I come to see you, Miss Derohan?"

I only hoped he might find the time—I was already lonely. Leaning through the window, he again shook hands, told me that the fare was paid, and bade the man drive on.

The lack of air in the streets stifled me—a savage fresh from the wilds! It seemed but a moment before the cab stopped in front of a tall, brown-stone house. I climbed its steps slowly, summoning all my courage, and rang the bell. I was told that Mrs. Spuyten would receive me upstairs, and, following the butler, was in the dreaded presence. By one of the lace-draped windows was seated a stout, fair-haired woman. I saw, with disappointment, that she did not resemble my father. Until then I had not realized how much I had hoped that she might, at least, look like him. He had been handsome and pleasing. His cousin was plain. Her flattened, aquiline nose, hard eyes, and broad-lipped mouth promised an uncertain temper.

As I advanced toward her, my black draperies hanging heavily about me, she did not rise, but, holding out a short, soft hand, said, peevishly:

"So this is Charles de Rohan's daughter! Dear me! Well—I might have expected nothing better!"

The insolence of this greeting shocked me. I looked at Mrs. Spuyten in haughty surprise.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"You may sit down." She spoke as to an inferior inclined to be impertinent. "I was surprised to see you in a cab."

"I did not know my way, Mrs. Spuyten," I murmured, at a loss how to answer. I had never been so spoken to before.

"Why didn't you pay the driver?"

"A friend did so for me," I said, coldly, "since you sent no one to meet me. I have no money. What you were good enough to lend me is spent, but I hope very soon to return it;—in a few months, if the situation that you have kindly secured for me brings in sufficient money."

It was a long speech for me. Mrs. Spuyten sat and stared, intense dislike in her small green eyes. Erect and indignant I endured this disapproving scrutiny, then—I felt my hair beginning to come down! The crape veil hanging down my back dragged on my bonnet, the bonnet on my hair. I sat very still, hoping my hairpins might stay in. Suddenly a long yellow snake slipped over one shoulder and coiled in a heap on my lap.

"Hoity-toity!" exclaimed my hostess, her eyes flashing in anger, "high-falutin nonsense! If you earn enough to keep out of the poor-house or from coming back on my hands like a bad penny, I'll give you the money! Because you're a de Rohan I'll help you, and I'll tell you how to show you're grateful. Drop that name. No de Rohan has ever been a servant—not that you will really be one"—thinking she had gone too far. "An excellent situation—housekeeper and companion to an old lady, an invalid. Lives up the river, somewhere near Drone-ton. Mrs. Erranti. Fifty dollars a month! Few impoverished country girls could get such a home."

I thanked her.

"The advertisement and de Rohan's death were

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

in the same paper. God's providence!—for I knew you'd come upon me. His guiding hand has always led me. I strive humbly to follow in all meekness."

Moistening her lips, she leaned back with a fat sigh.

Since she was one of my father's beneficiaries I might eat her salt, I told myself, without loss of self-respect. It was none the less trying, however.

"I suppose de Rohan often talked of me? What?" for I hesitated. "Can't you speak out? Have you lost your wits—as well as your hair-pins?"

I had. Mr. Thorpe had frankly confessed that no kind message accompanied Mrs. Spuyten's offer of assistance, had warned me that she was charitable only through fear of the world's tongue, yet—I was unprepared for her brutality of manner. She was old; I wished to be civil, but I was shocked into answering her question by a rude "No."

"No?" she echoed, incredulously. I marvelled that so fat a person could have a voice so shrill. "Do you mean to say, Miss, that he never spoke of me?"

"Until your lawyer came I had never heard your name, Mrs. Spuyten."

A carriage stopped before the house as I ceased speaking. Mrs. Spuyten rang her bell and a prim maid appeared. "Gregson, the young ladies are home. Show Miss de Rohan to her room quickly. They will need you."

Mrs. Spuyten's voice was hard, her face very pale—the blow had gone home.

I met the Misses Aurora and Eva Spuyten at dinner. My mother would have called them "old young ladies." Oddly enough, the elder resembled her stepmother. The younger was pretty, with curly hair and pink cheeks. They treated me with

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

cold indifference, not caring to conceal that they thought me a nuisance.

"What made you so late getting home, girls?" asked Mrs. Spuyten.

"Eva was talking to young Brown. I couldn't get her away." Aurora darted a spiteful glance at her sister.

"Mary Grace's fiancé? What were you saying to him, Evie?"

"He did the talking," Miss Eva pouted, looking cross.

"What did he say?" Mrs. Spuyten spoke pleasantly. Eva was evidently her favorite.

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" repeated Aurora. "I heard Dick Thorpe's name."

"Let's hear about Richard Thorpe, dear." Mrs. Spuyten's smile was arch and knowing. "What's your friend, Master Dick, been doing?"

"Dancing attendance on Princesses, wasn't that it, Evie?" said Aurora.

"Since you listened, tell yourself," was the tart rejoinder. "I like to hear about beautiful women—though I suppose it's hard for ugly old maids to understand my taste!"

"Hush, hush, girls!" besought Mrs. Spuyten, as the butler entered. "Dear me, what a hot day it's been!"

Her feeble attempt to preserve peace failed. Aurora, taking the bit in her teeth, was off—*au grand galop!*

"I'll tell you if Evie won't, mamma," shooting a wicked glance at her sister. "I'm not above liking a bit of gossip, and not selfish enough to refuse to pass it on—but, dear me," pretending to hesitate, "it may hurt dear Evie's feelings. Poor child—perhaps Dick——"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I don't care a button for Dick Thorpe!" cried Eva, her voice shrill with irritation. "What's it to me if he does escort other girls and put them in cabs? She was a married woman, most likely, anyway!"

"Mamma," said Aurora, impressively, "Eva is over-excited. Brown only said he saw Dick on the train when he was coming up from Babylon. He got on at Jamaica, Brown said, and joined the most perfectly beautiful girl he'd ever seen—a daughter of the gods, divinely fair!" Dick was so 'mashed,' Brown said, 'he couldn't see straight'—was as rude to him as 'get out!'"

"One of the Lympet girls, I dare say," commented Mrs. Spuyten, uncomfortably. "They're related to the Thorpes through the Beverleys."

"No," said Eva, with sudden sharpness, "Mr. Brown said Mr. Thorpe said she wasn't."

I was ill at ease, dreading questions. I was sufficiently disliked already by the Misses Spuyten, who had a perfect right to resent my presence in the house. They were under no obligation to my father. Aurora was unpleasantly shrewd. She suddenly fixed me with her bright, malicious glance.

"You came on that train, Miss Derohan?"

"Yes."

"It was you Mr. Thorpe put into a cab?"

"Yes, Mr. Thorpe was so kind."

Aurora laughed disagreeably.

"Young Brown's a fool!" cried Mrs. Spuyten. "Dick Thorpe's a shrewd fox! I'll have to pay for his forced civility—he'll put it on my little bill. Go to bed," turning fiercely upon me, "go to bed! Your mother's own daughter! I've heard enough!"

I was obliged to remain a week under Mrs. Spuyten's inhospitable roof. I had but little over a

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

dollar in my purse. Mrs. Erranti had not engaged me to come to her immediately, so there was nothing for it but to stay. Gregson, the maid, took me about on her shopping excursions. When indoors I spent my time in a dismal upstairs library. Mr. Thorpe called twice, but did not ask for me, Mrs. Spuyten said. She gave me to understand that he was the same as engaged to Eva, only this was not yet announced. He had been kind to me because of his affection for her.

I was ashamed that I felt Mr. Thorpe's neglect keenly. I regretted that he had been kind—that I had liked him so much—that I was under obligations to him. I despised myself for these feelings, and tried not to think of him at all. The task was difficult.

The last evening I was in town the house was fragrant with flowers—every vase and bowl the drawing-room contained heaped high with lilies-of-the-valley.

"How lovely!" I cried, leaning over a forest of the tiny bells to inhale their exquisite perfume. "I thought they were done blooming."

Mrs. Spuyten stared at me oddly.

"Yes," she said, slowly, "their season is over here, but—men are fools when they lose their heads about a girl. These have come from farther north, sent for—" she paused as if out of breath, "sent for—by Mr. Thorpe—for Eva."

That evening Eva wore a spray, with its sheaf of glossy leaves, in her fair curls. They looked pretty there. When I said so she flushed painfully, and I saw I had displeased her. Later, when I told Mrs. Spuyten that I could not change my name, I was equally unfortunate. She was very angry, becoming violent when, trying to comfort her, I sug-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

gested that no one would guess our relationship, since I never used the small d.

"The last touch," she screamed; "insulting the old name! I wish you were not a de Rohan! With God's help, you sha'n't be thought one much longer!"

V

From the time I was a little child my beauty had been constantly talked of. To my mother good looks were of vital importance. She rejoiced daily over mine. The gay people among whom she lived discussed my points as though I had been a valuable colt, unable to understand. Later, my beauty was an added distress to my father, who felt it needed a rich setting. During childhood my good looks were my most tiresome possession, and as I put on my bonnet for my journey, I feared they might prove an unfortunate one. Because of them I had failed to please the Spuytens. Mrs. Erranti might share their prejudices.

The day was depressing, with drizzling rain and heavy mist. Gregson, who went with me to the station, bought my ticket, and put me on the train, was in low spirits. With many apologies for the liberty, she gave me some good advice as to the management of servants. Then, handing me a letter and saying:

"For you to read when started—and may Heaven bless you and keep you, my dear young lady, and bring you to your own again!" she ran away, and I knew she was crying.

I had an odd, breathless sensation when Gregson left me. I suppose it was caused by fright. I felt exactly as one does when swung too high. I looked

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

about me at my fellow-passengers and then at the note in my hand, and in a few moments recovered my breath and my composure. An apparently unending succession of tunnels and startling flashes of daylight now and again, prevented my reading Mrs. Spuyten's letter, and even when we were once more in the open I put off breaking the seal. The contents were sure to be unpleasant.

It was a disappointment that rain and mist blotted out the view. I had heard much of the majestic beauty of the Hudson. All I saw from the car-window was a stretch of gray water lapping a muddy shore.

I opened the letter. It ran thus:

"MY DEAR ATHENA:—After sincere prayers for guidance, I decide to overlook your obstinate ingratitude. Without thought of self I do my duty as a true Christian. I have written to Mrs. Erranti that Miss *Augusta Dean* will arrive at Droneton at twelve this morning. The girls helped in the selection of your future name. It will save changing the marking of your clothes. Gregson informs me that yours have richly embroidered initials! We know no Deans, so awkwardness will be avoided.

"Strive to do your duty in the position to which Providence has called you, with the voice of His humblest instrument. Strive to overcome your besetting sin, sullen pride. Strive to forget the iniquitous years spent among gamblers and reprobates. Under Mrs. Erranti's sober guidance, in a remote country-house, you will have time for meditation and prayer.

"Do not answer this. I have done all that is possible to help you. 'Heaven helps those who help themselves'—so spare me begging letters.

"I send no messages to your employer. I have

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

not the pleasure of her acquaintance, nor do I wish for it, under present circumstances.

Your sincere well-wisher,
CORNELIA DE ROHAN SPUYTEN."

"Friday morning."

I glanced at the envelope. It was addressed to "Miss Augusta Dean."

Rigid with displeasure, I re-read the letter, hoping I had made a mistake; but no, I was indeed introduced under this hateful name to Mrs. Erranti. In the first flush of indignation I determined to explain Mrs. Spuyten's motive, to enter into full particulars, to tell my employer the truth. A half hour of sober reflection taught me this could not be done. Mrs. Spuyten vouched for me as Augusta Dean. A stranger might look upon me as an impostor if I called myself by my own name. Then, without money, what should I do? How obtain another situation? I decided to remain quiet, to work very hard, to pay Mrs. Spuyten what I owed her. After that—the Deluge!

The car was disagreeably close. Because of the rain the windows could not be opened; only cinders seemed to filter through the ventilators. My long veil tugged at my bonnet—clung, sticky and uncomfortable, about my throat and shoulders. The heat was intense. A tired baby began to wail. From its various discomforts the short journey grew interminable, but at last the brakeman shouted, "Droneton!" Again feeling very breathless I drew my veil across my face and, as Augusta Dean, left the car.

A coachman, in a heavy rain-coat, stood on the steps of the long station scanning each passenger who left the train. A neat young woman preceded me. The coachman stepped forward.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Miss Dean?" he asked, touching his hat.

"No, I ain't!" replied the young woman. She tossed her head and scurried away. The man looked disappointed.

"You are from Mrs. Erranti?" I said, stopping beside him.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Sent to meet—Miss Dean?"

The name fairly stuck in my throat. An alias was too new, too unaccustomed a garment. It fitted me ill.

"Yes, ma'am."

I gave him my check and went to the waiting-room, where he came for me almost immediately. Oppressed by the heat, I had thrown back my veil, and, as I followed my guide to a shabby, covered wagon, he began to apologize.

"I'm sorry, Miss"—wrenching open the curtained door—"that I didn't fetch the brougham. The master he's away to-day, and I got my orders from Madam's maid. She said I could as well bring you up in the market-wagon, but she's a French woman, and them furriners don't be knowin' much, I'm thinkin'! The seat's dry, Miss, and I'll have them baskets out to once."

The things he had put in were not in my way, and I said so, but out they came and in I got. My trunk and the baskets shared the damp front seat with him, and off we drove. Because of the rain and the curtains, I saw very little of the country. The coachman told me that Highgrove Hall, the Erranti place, was five miles north of Droneton, and added, with pride, that the private avenue was over a mile long! From the glimpses I caught over the man's shoulders I judged that the road was a lonely one, bordered by meadows and woodland, with here and there the gate-house of some estate. We were

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

whirled along at a rattling pace by an excellent roadster. The wagon might be shabby, but the horse was thoroughbred. In a surprisingly short time we drew up before a tall, iron gate, swung between giant pillars of red brick, and a cry of "Gate!" brought a sour-faced man limping from the lodge hard by.

"Come, hurry now, will ye?" cried my driver, as the gate was slowly unfastened—to my surprise it was chained and padlocked. "Here's the beast soakin' wet, an' the lady perishin' with the damp!"

"Lady!" ejaculated the lame man, with a harsh laugh, as the gate swung wide. "Lady!"

We dashed through into a dark avenue winding under trees dripping with moisture. The woods advanced close to the road on either side, thick, overgrown, melancholy-looking.

"You'll not be mindin' old Pat, Miss," apologetically; "he's an ugly divil."

I made no reply. I did mind old Pat!

The long avenue was monotonous, unchanging. No attempt had been made to open up views, yet I felt sure we were following a high ridge commanding, but for the impenetrable woodland, a prospect of the river. At last there came an opening in the trees; we passed a mass of buildings on the right, a long garden wall, and in another moment stopped in front of a large, square house.

Highgrove Hall was a red brick mansion, three stories in height, a ponderous structure with great windows, and a broad veranda encircling it on three sides. On the east, the side away from the river, what had once been veranda had been built up to make a new room. The window looking toward the front in this addition was heavily shuttered, but through a glass door which led from it to the veranda shone a bright pink glow. Evidently the occupant

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

of this room, finding the day too dark and dreary, had had recourse to lamplight. Inside the glass door hung a pink silk curtain. This was the one cheerful object anywhere to be seen.

To the east of the house rose a steep, rocky knoll, surmounted by a grove of pines. This the driver pointed out to me, saying it was the grove for which the house was named. As he spoke, the heavy front door swung open, a tall, sallow-faced young man appeared on the threshold and languidly invited me to enter and sit down.

"I'll see to your trunk," he said, with an air of gentle endurance of the evils of life. "My, ain't your horse awful wet, Larry. This damp goes right straight to my throat;" then, in answer to some remark of Larry's, "Oh, you're a tough, you are—in every sense of the word!"

The hall into which the butler ushered me was very large and handsome, running the length of the house. The end opposite the front door was entirely of glass, through which one caught a glimpse of distant woodland. One might have seen more had not a mass of palms and flowering plants, in big, green tubs, filled this immense window. They formed a charming background, however, for a beautiful marble statue of Fortune, with her wheel, which stood before them. The goddess looked as though just emerging from this bower of greenery, to smile a greeting to incoming guests, a graceful figure, with the air of being the presiding genius of the place.

The floor of the hall was of white marble—in great square blocks—and the lofty frescoed ceiling was supported by slender pillars of the same cold, shining stone; six on either side. Two rooms opened off the hall on the left—the river side of the house—but their doors were shut; to the right, but one, at the back of the hall, the space in front being occupied

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

by a great staircase. It rose, massive yet graceful in its deep recess, to a broad landing, above which was a large window of stained glass. There it branched to right and left, winding to the second story. Underneath the window, in a spacious niche, gleamed another white statue—the Venus de Medici.

So far the hall was perfect—imposing in its spaciousness, and cold severity of marble—but the furnishings were barbarous and out of keeping. Between the pillars were broad divans, covered with rich, red satin, or white-and-gold brocade, piled high with luxurious cushions, while above them great mirrors in broad gold frames covered the walls nearly to the ceiling, reflecting the marble pillars, great staircase, and smiling Venus, until one lost oneself in endless vistas.

On the white floor—a shining floor of ice it might have been—were strewn richly colored rugs, tiger-skins, and one great Polar bear-skin, this last not out of place on the ice-like marble. Because of the oriental magnificence, I might have imagined myself in the hall of some Indian potentate—a mighty Rajah! I was so much interested it did not seem long before the butler reappeared, coming from the back of the recess which the staircase filled. He advanced toward me with slow and languid tread, and remembering he was one over whom I was to hold authority I looked at him curiously. He was tall, slender, and melancholy-looking, but with something comic in his appearance—as if the air of dejection might be an affectation merely. His brown hair was worn long in front to allow of its being arranged in a love-lock, curling loosely over his high, sallow forehead. His eyebrows were raised, as if in constant surprise that anyone should care to exist in so sad a world, and his long nose seemed contemptuously a-droop in its profound disgust with its surroundings.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Madam will see you now, Miss Dean," he drawled, as he approached, adding, as I rose and followed him across the hall. "It's one of her bad days—but you needn't mind—'rooms to let,' you know!" and he tapped his forehead, significantly.

He led me to the door from which he had just entered the hall, to the left of the staircase at the back of its recess, and I knew it led to the part of the veranda that had been enclosed. He opened it, and I found myself in a narrow passage with three doors—besides that by which I had entered—leading from it. The butler, noticing my glances of interest, pointed with his long thumb from one to the other, saying:

"This to the left, pieazza; in front, Madam's maid's room—oh, she's a caution, she is!—that one, down the entry, Madam's own apartment," and, flinging open this last with much ceremony, he ushered me in, saying impressively, "Miss Dean, Madam!"

I entered—and found myself in a new world.

VI

The little entry had been very dark, as was the great hall, in spite of its huge window, for the June day itself was sombre. The dull mist which hung over woodland and river had stolen into the house, filling it with dark shadows. But the room I entered was so brilliant in its pink radiance that for a moment my eyes were dazzled and I could hardly see. In every nook and corner lamps and candles were burning brightly, each provided with a pink shade. Like the great hall, the walls were lined with mirrors in broad gold frames; beneath these again were ranged divans covered with pale pink silk and heaped with cushions. The ceiling was gayly painted with garlands of roses, over which hovered myriads of bright-winged butterflies and birds of dazzling plumage. The windows were curtained with pink silk under white lace; the bed of highly polished rose-wood wore a counterpane to match.

In the bed, propped up by lace-edged pillows, in lace cap and dressing-gown a-flutter with pink ribbons, sat a little, old lady, taking her mid-day meal; a pretty old lady—although her head was too large, her cheek-bones too high, and her features irregular—with clear, olive skin, large brown eyes as bright as diamonds, and cheeks as pink as her room.

On a table by the bed was the lunch-tray, and bending over it, her back toward me, the old lady's maid, a gay figure, in pink cambric frock and snowy

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

cap and apron. When I entered she had just given her mistress a chicken pinion. Madam Erranti, holding it in her fingers, was gnawing it with luxurious enjoyment, when she heard me announced. She stopped eating to look, but directly her eyes fell on me she shut them tight, like a child who sees something frightful, and cried out in French:

"She is like the day! All black, all black! I won't look at her! Send her away!"

She turned her head from me, warding off my approach with the half-picked pinion. At this the maid rose from her stooping posture to see the cause of the commotion, but no sooner had she glanced at me than, growing very pale, she exclaimed:

"*Mon Dieu!*—Mademoiselle Derohan!"

I was no less astonished to find in Mrs. Erranti's attendant, Julie, my mother's maid.

"You, Julie!" I cried, in my turn. "In America!—and Cray?"

"He, too, mademoiselle. And why? *Ma foi*, as all the rest, for money!"

We had forgotten the autocrat in the bed. She recalled us to a sense of our proper positions by saying, sharply:

"Take off her bonnet, Julie! Cover her black robe with my white shawl. So—now I will look at her. *Dieu! Qu'elle est belle!*"

After staring for some moments, she added:

"I would see her hair. Take it down, Julie."

Julie obeyed, silently, swiftly. She was a perfect maid.

I sat quite still, submissive, uncomfortable. The room was warm, the silken shawl was warm, my hair, hanging over the shawl, was more than warm: it was suffocating.

But Madam Erranti was pleased.

"Magnificent!" she cried, in sudden excitement.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"It is gold! Pure gold! It is like rays of sunshine! No red—I detest red—pure, golden sunshine!" In English—she had spoken in French—she now quoted the line:

"'A little sunshine in a shady place.' You know that, *n'est-ce pas?* But yes, of course, for you are not a common person—like Julie here—no, no, no! You are a lady, an aristocrat, *une grande dame—comme moi!*'"

She leaned back among her pillows, dropping the chicken-bone on a plate on her bed-tray. "Yes, yes, I, too, am a lady.—Julie, wash my hands."

Julie, as impassive as I remembered her always to have been, offered a finger-bowl. I could not see that she had altered in any way—the same handsome, hard-featured Julie of six years ago.

"Yes, yes, I am a lady," Madam Erranti went on, holding out her dripping fingers to Julie, who dried them carefully; "a lady, a true lady—so I never ask rude, tiresome, disobliging questions, but I use my eyes; yes, yes, and my ears, too!" She screwed up her eyes, looking cunningly at me. "I know you have changed your name! Philip said Miss Dean was coming, but—Julie called you something else, de—something—what was it? Julie knows you, Philip does not. De—something—de—de——?"

Glad to be found out, I told her of Mrs. Spuyten's wish, and why she wished it, and the reason Julie knew me. In spite of her remark to the contrary she asked very many questions, then nodded her head gravely and approvingly several times.

"Your cousin is quite right," she said, "so Philip and the servants shall know you as Miss Dean. Augusta! What a name! Gussie! I detest it! For a girl of thy remarkable grace and beauty—ah, *Mon Dieu!* horrible! Julie may call thee *Mademoiselle*, it is sufficient; but I, I shall call thee *Athena*,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

for we are of the same class, we two, and can understand each other. I have been lonely, yes, very lonely! A solitary old woman—all, all, alone!”

Her eyes began to glitter strangely; she beckoned me to come nearer.

“Come close, closer still, let me touch thy pretty hair.”

As I obeyed, leaning over the bed, she drew a long lock caressingly through her fingers and I saw that they were badly swollen and twisted by rheumatism.

“Pure gold,” she said, “pure gold—so pale, yet shimmering like sunshine.” Then, lowering her voice, she whispered, hastily, “If you would hide your name you must do as I did—first shoot it, then bury it deep, then run, run, run!—and never tell.”

Julie’s voice sounded close at my elbow.

“Madame must eat her strawberries,” she said, dexterously edging in so that I had to draw back, “Behold them then! They are magnificent,” and she placed a plate of great red berries on the tray across which her mistress was leaning.

“May hell engulf thee!” cried the old lady furiously as, lifting a swollen hand, she struck at the intrusive maid. “*Que l’enfer t’engouffre!*”

Julie avoided the blow with a dexterity born of long practice, while Madam began to eat her strawberries as if nothing had happened, and for a time nothing was heard save the cracking of the seeds as she ground them between her strong teeth.

“The music?” she demanded presently—speaking always in French—“you love it, yes?”

She was pleased to hear that I did, but unhappy when she learned that I could neither sing nor play.

“*Mon Dieu*, what a pity! But I will play for you—the guitar to-day, the piano to-morrow. I am a fine musician, truly. But I am naughty, I do not

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

study enough. I will begin soon now, very soon. I'll study my scales to-day—no, to-morrow. I will teach thee, Athena. Julie!" turning suddenly upon the Frenchwoman, "Pig! Imbecile! Give me my guitar."

Julie obeyed in silence, but her eyes flashed dangerously.

Madam took the beautifully inlaid instrument without troubling to say "Thank you," and began to strum with nervous, uncertain fingers.

"Philip keeps it in tune for me," she explained; "keeps it ever ready."

She began to sing, in a thin, cracked voice, inexpressibly pathetic, "*La Départ Pour La Syrie.*"

*"Partant pour la Sy-ri-e,
Le jeune et brave Du-nois,
Venait pri-er Mari-e
De-de-de—"*

She could get no further, seeking vainly for forgotten words and notes.

"*De—mais de quoi?* Which fret was I pressing? This—no—that? No—oh, *bon Dieu!* Why may I not remember?"

She looked helplessly at me, tears blurring the brightness of her eyes. Julie came forward.

"Monsieur will sing it for Madame when he returns," she said, an odd note in her voice, "Monsieur who sings so beautifully! I speak of Monsieur Erranti, Mademoiselle, the son of Madame—Monsieur Philip. Ah, but Mademoiselle should hear him! He sings as the birds! So handsome, also, though not with the look of Madame, his mother. A grief to Monsieur Erranti, doubtless, that he should not resemble Madame, Monsieur is so entirely devoted to Madame—*sa mère!*"

Julie's handsome face through this rhapsody re-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

mained as coldly expressionless as usual. I looked at her mistress. She had lost her color, the sweet old face wore a hunted, frightened look. Then I knew that in some hidden way the maid had revenged herself for insults endured. Madam held out the guitar in two shaking hands.

"Take it away," she said feebly. "I am tired. I want my nap." I rose to go. "No," she cried, motioning me to sit down again. "No, I forgot. See, Julie, open the oak chest there—the third."

Going to a divan, Julie pushed aside the cushions, removed its cover, and disclosed a large chest of oak.

"*Eh bien, Madame!*" she said, awaiting further orders.

Madam looked at me.

"For whom do you mourn, my child?"

I told her.

"But I can't live with black people!" she cried pettishly, "I don't like black people! And you, do you like black people?"

"Black people?" I repeated stupidly, bewildered both by the heat and Madam's oddities. "Do you mean negroes, Madam?"

She burst out laughing.

"Absurd child! I mean—" she stopped laughing, frowned, looked at me suspiciously. "Negroes? What did I say about negroes? Nothing, nothing, nothing! What do you know of negroes? Speak, child, what, what, what?"

"Nothing at all," I said, ashamed of my dulness as I realized she had but alluded to my black clothes. "I have never known any negroes—I have seen very few."

"*Grand Dieu!*" exclaimed the old lady. "Never known a nigger! Seen very few! *Grand Dieu!* What a strange child—while I, I——"

"Perhaps Mademoiselle will consent to wear white

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

when with Madame," broke in Julie, unconscious, apparently, that she was rudely interrupting. "See," pointing to her pink frock with a shrug of her shoulders, "when I had the honor of serving Mademoiselle's mother I wore always black, as a *femme de chambre* should—while now, behold me!" she raised her eyebrows, spread out her hands. "To please Madame! A livery—*rien de plus!*"

"May I think it over, Madam?"

Every moment the room grew warmer and I more befogged.

"Yes, yes," said the old lady peevishly, "This afternoon, when I have had my siesta—"

Julie drew from the chest a number of morning-gowns, pink, blue, many-tinted.

"All mine!" cried Madam proudly, "and many, many more! Every box is full—yes, they are all great boxes"—a sweeping gesture toward the divans—"and heaping, heaping full! Open some, Julie; let Mademoiselle see."

Nothing loath, Julie complied. Soon the floor was covered with displaced cushions, while chairs and bed disappeared beneath mountains of finery. Madam Erranti was evidently a magpie, since many of the gowns were cut after a fashion of twelve years before. Brocades, rich silks that would stand alone, shimmering satins, India muslins, shawls, laces, embroideries, undergarments, even gloves came out of the chests that lined the walls.

Julie had two passions, money and dress. In her element among Madam's treasures she forgot their owner, who now lifted her voice in complaint.

"I am so tired, so tired!" she wailed. "I want my nap—I want it immediately—I want it now! Put up her hair, send her away. *Vite, vite, vite!*"

Julie came to herself with a start, and hurrying to me coiled up my hair with nimble fingers.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I will ring for Claude, Madame, Mademoiselle will desire her luncheon."

"*Mais oui, oui, oui!*" screamed Madam, irritable through fatigue. "*Vite, vite, vite!*"

As I left the room Julie whispered: "When Madame sleeps I will come, that together we may arrange this little matter of the toilette, *n'est-ce pas?*" I said yes, quickly, only anxious to escape from the heat and the weary old lady. It was with a keen sensation of relief that I re-entered the cool marble gloom of the great hall. Mentally, I was very, very tired.

VII

It was quite two o'clock when I left Madam Erranti's room. The butler, who had come to fetch me in answer to Julie's summons, led the way at once to the dining-room, a handsome apartment in oak on the same side of the hall as the staircase. It boasted as many mirrors as the hall and Madam Erranti's bedroom. On the table was spread a slender luncheon of cold chicken, bread and butter, and tea. To my surprise the butler did not leave the room after he had gone through the ceremony of seating me, but took up his position by the chimney-piece, against which he lounged in a would-be elegant attitude. He looked supremely ridiculous.

"I imagine this is your first place, Miss Dean," he began, in his gentle drawl.

"Yes."

"Think you'll get on with the old lady?"

I said I could not tell yet. The bread, I noticed, was abominable, and I foresaw trouble with the cook.

"She ain't bad if you get on her right side, though she does say awful things when she gets mad—cusses like fury!" and he giggled suddenly. "But then my mother does the same. I guess likely it's a way all old ladies has. My mother's a Irish-woman, and my father, he was the same—he's dead. I was born in this country. I ain't a bit Irish myself. Are you American?"

"Yes."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Parents, too?"

"Yes."

He was silent. I wondered if my short answers had hurt his feelings. I hoped not, but he looked all feeling, somehow. In spite of his affectation, and his familiarity, there was something kindly and pleasing about him. Presently he removed my plate, asking if I would have some pie, and I was glad to see from his manner that I had not offended him.

"It's custard pie," he said, sadly. "Norah makes splendid pie. Not that I've eat any, but I know by the look of it. I guess it's goin' on two years since I've eat a piece of pie. Dispepsy. Do you have it?"

Explaining that I was always well, but did not care for pie, I rose to leave the room.

"Say," he burst out with an excited titter, "the girls are in a terrible way about you! No house-keepers allowed on the premises—and so forth!" Winking knowingly, he pointed downward with his thumb.

I stared at him bewildered. He was very strange.

"A thousand pardons!" came Julie's voice from the door-way. "Mademoiselle is finished?"

"Can't you speak English, Jewlee?" asked the butler, with a teasing grin, "What do you want comin' parlezvooin' 'round here for? Miss Dean don't understand your gibberish no more than me."

She turned upon him fiercely.

"When you address me, sir, have the kindness to remember that I am Mrs. Cray!"

"That's somethin' Cray would as leave forget, I guess," said the man with a delighted giggle.

"Mr. Claude Melnotte Raffarty, you are impertinent," retorted Julie, "but you are a fool! It matters little what you say. Mademoiselle permits that I accompany her to her room?" she asked with exag-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

gerated respect. "It is the wish of Madame that I do so. For you, butler—you may carry the basket!"

"Oh, come off!" remonstrated Claude. "What are you givin' us?"

He stood aside to let me precede him in leaving the room, not from respect to a superior—he thought me of his own class—but as a man of gallantry and fine manners! I could not but feel lowered by his air of equality, though indignant with myself for my inward objections. What did it matter, so long as I paid my debts and earned my bread? Yet Julie seemed to share my discomfort. She hated aristocrats and, thinking me one, enjoyed seeing me brought low. Still she disliked seeing a fellow-servant—as a Frenchwoman she felt immeasurably superior—too familiar with the daughter of her former mistress. Desiring to treat me with the freedom allowable in an old servant, longing to put the butler in his proper place, she became captious toward him, absurdly respectful to me.

At the foot of the great staircase was a clothes-basket overflowing with silks, muslins, laces. To my surprise Claude's long fallow face lighted up at sight of this finery.

"For the Land's sake, Mrs. Cray," he ejaculated, fingering the silks caressingly, "what's up? What ever are you goin' to do with all this elegant stuff?"

"Help me to carry it to the room of Mademoiselle and you shall see, *grand enfant!*" said Julie, taking a handle of the basket.

"Call me pet names, dearest!" giggled Claude as, seizing the other, he ran upstairs so quickly that Julie—panting, shrieking remonstrances in French and English—had much ado to keep up with him.

I followed slowly, admiring the beauty of the staircase and examining with interest the upper hall. This

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

was arranged as a smoking-room with divans, easy-chairs, and, in a handsome cabinet, a quantity of pipes of all shapes and sizes. On the wall hung a wonderful collection of weapons, and beside a door stood a huge iron safe. As I was gazing at this Claude appeared, out of breath, but grinning with delight.

"Thought you might not know the way"—he spoke very loudly—"so I told the old girl I'd run down and show you up."

He pointed a flexible thumb over his shoulder toward the door from which he had emerged. An indignant exclamation floating down from above in answer to his speech told me that Julie was waiting for me at the top of a back staircase. Claude giggled again, then, seeing my interest in the safe, said, more soberly, "That's where we keep our valuables. Peggy—she's the mastiff, lives at the stables day-times—is chained to that ring you see clamped in the side there at night. That's Mr. Erranti's room it stands by. If he hears anyone tamperin' with it, or with Peg, he'll just step out and giv' 'em kingdom come. He's an awful light sleeper—sleeps mighty little, too. 'Twould bust me all up to live the way he does, but then I ain't as strong as I'd like to be, I ain't"—he gave himself a languid thump on his chest. "Want to see the rooms? 'Twon't take a minute; there's only five of 'em, see"—he opened the door on the left.

I entered. It was a large room with two great windows, the furniture handsome but uninteresting. I saw that it had been left entirely to the upholsterer. Everything possible was draped in cream-tinted cretonne sown with pink roses—the "Pink Room," as the butler now announced.

"Sweet, ain't it? The view across the river is lovely—fine days. Exposure, southwest. I'm told

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

it's the healthiest. Drawing-room is under this—'tain't much used, though."

He led the way through a small dressing-room into another corner room, where big poppies took the place of the roses. "Red room," said the man; "handsome, very. Boss's apartment; exposure, northwest. Grand view across and up river, good weather. This damp goes to my throat, it's real weak"—coughing slightly. "You can see old Mr. Beverley's estate from this window, when this horrid fog ain't mizzlin' down. His land's north of ours. Got a gorgeous big house, gray stone; Beverley Towers they call it. He's awful rich, they say. This"—opening another door—"is the Boss's dressin'-room. Monstrous big for a hall room, but, you see, the hall is wide. Seems a pity to use it for a dressin'-room, but then there's only one window, and it's north, so 'tain't to say so desirable for bedroom purposes—that is, if health's considered. This"—with an air of still greater importance—"is the Blue Room, the last of the suit. Has a dressin'-room, too, t'other side. Handsome large room, but kinder gloomy, this window bein' north and that other, though east, under the hill—sort of shut in, ain't it? My! Just listen to that French woman tiradin' in the distance! Ain't she fearfully mad! Taking on in her native tongue, I guess—Hail Columbias and big D's *ad libertum*! Comin'—comin' directly, lady fair! What, can't you live without me one minute?"

He opened the door into the hall, which was near the narrow dark passage leading to the back staircase. At its end a steep flight of stairs led upward.

"You open the door just behind and you'll find the way down, but you might as well use the front stairs while the Boss is away," said my companion, good-naturedly. Then addressing Julie, angry and impatient at the top of the narrow flight, "No, I can't stay

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

another minute with you, Mrs. Cray, so there's no use coaxing. Dear me! and you a married lady, too! I'm astonished at your goin's on!"

"*Canaille!*" fiercely, from the stair-top.

"Can I? No, it's can't I, this time, Mrs. Cray—so adoo, adoo!"

Giggling wildly over his own witticisms, he opened the door he had pointed out to me and vanished below.

The third story of Highgrove Hall was as plain as the others were handsome. Around the small hall as many bedrooms as possible had been made. A little corner one fell to my share. I was glad that it was simply furnished. Julie asked permission to unpack my trunk, and, though she made no comments, I saw that its slenderness and shabbiness astonished her.

"These frocks of cotton," she observed, as she put my gingham in a drawer, "Mademoiselle may wear in the morning, very early, when superintending the affairs of the household—the *ménage*. Not later than ten of the clock. At that hour Mademoiselle will do well to rearrange her toilette. I have Madame's orders to see Mademoiselle well supplied with toilettes—and of a pleasing variety; *voilà!*" indicating, with a superb gesture, the contents of the basket.

I did not wish to accept garments of silk and lace from a stranger. This I told Julie, but she refused to listen to my objections. Madame, she said, was old, whimsical, out of health. Her physicians ordered that she should be humored in every way. Her son insisted that these orders should be carried out to the letter. Madame would never consent to my appearing before her in black. If I found the situation not to my taste—"Ma foi, might Mademoiselle not leave the robes behind when she went away? The materials were not, after all, of a richness so

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

remarkable—*pas du tout!* As a child Mademoiselle had ever been robed as a princess, she was accustomed——”

Here I interposed, saying the very servants might be expected to look askance at a housekeeper flaunting such fine feathers.

“Not at all!” cried Julie, “I myself will explain—they will comprehend. Mademoiselle was ever gentle, amiable, as a child. Will she now deny pleasure to an old lady—*une vrai dame*—solitary, *souffrante*? Ah, *jamais!*”

At last I consented, feeling that she was in the right.

After all there was nothing so miserable, so flimsy as false pride. I put mine behind me while Julie rummaged among the silks and muslins.

“*Eh bien*, Mademoiselle,” she exclaimed, gayly, “it is necessary to make a beginning! Ah, if Mademoiselle could but sew as she embroidered when a mere child! *Ma foi*, I remember yet that embroidery! Marvellous, truly—but sewing, that is different.”

I exclaimed that I could also sew, having made all my clothes for years.

“*Juste ciel!*” cried my mother’s *ci-devant* maid, in tones of real horror, “is it then possible!”

We set to work together. Seeing Julie reminded me of something Mrs. Spuyten had told me—that Lord Ebbrides had been robbed of my mother’s emeralds shortly after he had gained possession of them, but the thieves had replaced them almost immediately, putting them back in the very safe from which they had taken them; a strange story, hardly to be believed. Since Cray had been in Lord Ebbrides’s service at that time, and had taken Julie, as well as the emeralds, back to London with him, I asked her about this robbery. She seemed disin-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

clined to talk about it, protesting that she knew nothing of the matter.

"It is all so long ago, Mademoiselle. A thousand pardons for turning thus"—rising to place her chair close in front of the window—"with my back to Mademoiselle—a great rudeness truly, but what will you? It is like night, so dark!"

"Did it happen while you were there, or after you left, Julie?"

"Did what happen, Mademoiselle? Hark! What was that? Did I hear calling?"

I listened, but heard nothing save the drip, drip, drip of the rain upon the veranda roof, a story below.

The afternoon was, as Julie said, like night. The thick mist hung heavily about the house, the rain fell soft and fine, making no sound save that of its ceaseless dripping, dull, monotonous, never-ending—a death-watch drip.

"About the robbery, Julie?"—I was interested—"Had you and Cray already left Lord Ebbrides's service?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, and—I know nothing. It will be well," she gathered up her work, "if we descend and sew in Madame's room. There it is always light, while here, *mon Dieu*, the darkness is horrible!"

I followed, though dreading the heat of that gay, scented room. All the afternoon and, after supper until nine o'clock, we sewed and sewed and sewed! Madam, bright and cheerful after her nap, kept us hard at work. It amused her to see the garment grow under our fingers. In the fashioning of fine raiment for her companion she had found a new diversion; in me, the companion, a new toy—a doll.

And I—I longed with a feverish intensity, foreign to my nature, for my old life on Long Island; for

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

the shabby old gray farm-house, where I was mistress—as well as maid. I longed for the breeze sweeping in off the breakers; for the wild, sweet song of the sea.

As I looked about the strange luxurious cage in which I found myself, my spirit beat in rebellion against the bars of my poverty. I grew desperate in my longing to be free.

VIII

At half-past six the next morning I was awake and astir. The moment I opened my eyes I saw that the world was bright again, and, anxious to see the river, I ran at once to the window and looked out. Ah, what a view! I stood, fascinated, till the wild north wind drove me to dress in haste. The great river was as blue as a sapphire, and the turbulent wind had whipped it into angry, foam-capped waves. Broad and majestic, it flowed grandly southward to join the sea, obeying tidal-laws without nervous hurry. It satisfied and half cured me of my home-sick longing for the sea.

The opposite banks, backed by fine hills, seemed very far away. To the south, over the mass of trees which shut out the view, I caught a glimpse of a dark, straight line against the horizon—the Palisades. Close beneath my north window a stretch of lawn ended in a belt of woodland, beyond which, on the summit of a gentle eminence, two lofty gray stone towers showed themselves above a mass of trees. These I recognized as “Beverley Towers,” and knew I was looking at the home of Richard Thorpe’s uncle—and of Nemesis.

Highgrove Hall was so buried in its encircling woods that I was thankful for my room in the third story, where I had an outlook over the river. The lower rooms were completely shut in. Wishing to

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

see more, I determined to go down to the river, and as it was but seven, and breakfast would not be ready till eight, I had plenty of time. Stealing softly downstairs, I saw the butler standing before the front door, which he had evidently just opened. Under his arm he carried a duster, and his long, slim person was enveloped in a long, white apron.

It covered him almost completely and was fastened by a great number of narrow, white strings. As I crossed the hall he was gazing, with an air of gloomy abstraction, at the antics of a young mastiff on the road before the house. The big puppy was lumbering around and around in pursuit of its own tail, with an earnestness comical enough.

"Good morning," I said, not knowing whether to call the man Raffarty or Claude.

"Oh!" he said, turning, "so it's you, Miss Dean. Good morning! Just look at that purp! Ain't he a fool! A great, big dorg, two years old next May! I should think he'd be ashamed of himself! There"—in deep tragic tones, as the puppy, having succeeded, was brought suddenly to a sitting posture and yapped dismally over the pain his own teeth had inflicted—"there—I knew he'd be sorry if he done it! Don's an awful silly creature, and his mother's as wise as wise."

I tried to comfort the foolish, jolly, young dog, who advanced to meet me wagging the bitten tail and looking absurdly sheepish and self-conscious.

"Where is his mother?" I asked.

The butler, strolling to the veranda edge, watched me as I petted the mastiff and tried to avoid the long pink tongue thrust out to lick my face.

"She's in the stable. It's Peggy, the one I was tellin' you of yesterday. He"—pointing at the puppy—"is called Don. His name is Don Jew-Anne—Don June some folks pernounce it, I'm told—but

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

no one calls him that, and no wonder. It's a queer, heathenish name. Spanish, they say."

"What am I to call you," I asked, "Claude or Raffarty?"

"You may suit yourself, Miss Dean"—he spoke solemnly, it was evidently a matter of importance. "The Boss calls me Raffarty. He says Claude and Melnotte are too absurd for a butler. They are romantic"—he folded his arms and looked melancholy—"but my mother is romantic. Some—ladies of my acquaintance—think it suits me rather well.—He arranged his curl on his forehead, and sighed.

"Very well, then, I will call you Claude."

"Thank you, Miss Dean; you are very considerate and kind."

A moment of silence followed; then, exclaiming, "Lordy! It wants a whole hour till breakfast! Just wait here a minute, Miss Dean," Claude hurried away, returning almost immediately, bearing a tray aloft on his outspread hand, after the wonderful fashion of waiters. On the tray was a pitcher of milk and a glass. "An empty stummick's a bad thing," he said, "'specially if you're thinkin' of a stroll. So you'd better drink a glass of milk. It's what you call 'fresh from the cow!' It makes me sickish, myself, but most folks seem to like it."

It was a kindly action and I was grateful. So might Don have been had he been allowed to dip his black muzzle into the glass, but Claude politely warded him off with the toe of his highly polished shoe. While drinking the milk I looked about me with much interest. Everything, hidden in mist the day before, now showed so clearly in the early morning sunshine. But even sunshine could not make Highgrove Hall, or its surroundings, look cheerful, because of the dense woods which closed in, dark and impenetrable, scarce a stone's throw from the house.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

To my left rose the high brick wall of the garden, and beyond, almost buried in trees, the stables and gardener's house.

Little of the northwest wind, racing at such a mad pace down the river, penetrated to the veranda of the Hall. The tops of the trees rustled finely, but the leaves of the underbrush scarcely stirred. The air was cold and pure, what there was of it, but I longed for the rush of the wind. I had felt choked ever since leaving Long Island.

"My, ain't it chilly!" said my companion, shivering. "Who'd think 'twas June! If you're going to the river, Miss Dean, you'd better take a wrap of some sort. I'll run get you one if you say the word." I thanked him, but declined, saying the exercise would keep me warm. At the mention of a walk Don pricked up his ears and asked to go along, and of this Claude approved. "There's a precious lot of tramps in these diggin's, and though Don June is nothin' but a purp, still"—eying the big creature dispassionately—"he don't show at first sight what a everlasting fool he is. He looks fierce—yes, his appearance is awfully ferocious, and appearances is the main thing after all, these days."

I am fond of dogs and was glad of Don's company. Together we crossed the short lawn and, traversing a thicket of firs which topped the steep bank above the river, found a flight of steps which led down to the railroad track, and beyond, by another flight, reached the shore. On either hand the shore was rocky, but directly in front a pretty, grassy point stretched out into the river. On its south side was a red brick boat-house, a miniature Highgrove Hall. Where the point joined the land were tiny, pebbly beaches, and on one of these lay a fisherman's dory, drawn up just out of reach of the mimic ocean surges, which were beating against the pebbles with great violence.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

The wind rushed upon us as we struggled out to the end of the point, as though it wished to fling us into the water. It exhilarated me, but Don, by turns barking angrily at the noisy waves and bouncing away from them when a drop chanced to strike him, told me plainly he would prefer returning home, though determined not to go without me.

Few craft were to be seen. Far to the right a tug was laboriously dragging a line of canal-boats up stream, while as far away to the left a big sailing vessel, close-reefed, was scudding southward. But one other boat was in sight. This last, a tiny cat-boat, was dancing in a dangerous fashion upon the stormy river half a mile off shore. A few moments' observation convinced me that it was sailed by one ignorant of boat-craft, and I knew that little short of a miracle could prevent its capsizing in one of the sudden squalls that swept the river. The crisis came even sooner than I had expected. Down rushed the wind upon the pretty toy and, as if in wanton sport, flung it down upon the water. The waves lifted the shining side into view, but no one was to be seen clinging to it.

I raced for dear life to the old dory on the beach. It was half full of water, and the oars were gone. As, thinking they might be hidden in the bushes growing among the rocks, I searched eagerly for them, Don, delighted by my activity, tripped me up in his endeavors to join the game. At last, when I had given up hope, I came upon them. The blade of one was broken, but it was better than none. I heaved the old boat over on its side, but before the water had time to run out had righted her again and launched her, in my desperate fear of arriving too late.

I had to fight my way inch by inch to the wreck. The heavy dory leaked—I had to stop to bail—the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

wind buffeted me, the tide dragged me sideways, and all the time a horror of what I might find entangled in the sail sapped my courage. This was spared me, for although the face of the young man whom I found clinging to the hull, was already blue with chill and exhaustion, he was alive, though little more. When I had succeeded in dragging him by main strength into the boat, for he helped himself but little, he fell in a heap on the bottom and showed no inclination to move.

"You had better take an oar and try to row, even if you don't know how," I said, "the effort may start your circulation."

This insult stung him into life, and crawling feebly upon a seat he took the oar I offered, in his shaking hands. On one there blazed a splendid ring—an emerald of great beauty, set in diamonds. It was Nemesis! But I had no chance to look at her wearer in my struggle to get the boat safely to shore, where Don, who had begun to howl the moment I had left him, still stood wailing dismally. He had not howled in vain, for by his side I saw the ubiquitous Claude, his long apron fluttering in the wind, gazing toward us with intense anxiety. The butler was emotional and did not hide his feelings. As we drew near I saw that he was wringing his hands in his distress, and his agitation, more than the wind, seemed to cause the numberless strings of his apron to shiver in sympathy. By his side was one of the under-gardeners, who rushed with him, knee-deep, into the water and dragged the boat high and dry upon the shore.

"If it ain't Mr. Randal St. John!" Claude exclaimed at sight of my shivering companion. "For the land's sake, sir, run up to the house and change your clothes. There's plenty of Mr. Erranti's things in his dressin'-room, and I'll come with you and

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

get you a drink. No, no, don't stop to thank Miss Dean," as the young man would have spoken to me. "Don't you see she's soaked through, too, 'long o' savin' you? Go 'long up to the Hall, do, sir! Dolan'll see to your boat; and you too, Miss Dean, 'fore you catch your death of cold." Then, seeing me petting Don, who whimpered with as much delight over our reunion as if we were old friends, he turned upon Mr. St. John again. "Will you have the goodness to run ahead, sir, and get off them wet things? I'll see to Miss Dean," and as Mr. St. John obeyed, "He's awful sickly, ain't he? Why, he couldn't have been immersed very long, yet just look at him! As white as chalk, and as blue as an indigo bag! And you looking as ca'm and steady—not to say rosy cheeked, for that I should judge you seldom be, Miss Dean—but as nice and cool and healthy-lookin' as usual."

I began to walk homeward briskly. My wet clothes were uncomfortable, but as yet I was not cold. Like Claude, I had been astonished, and not a little alarmed, by the evident delicacy of my whilom companion. If I had not reached the boat when I did I fancied he might have dropped into the water and sunk—from exhaustion and cold. I was thankful I had arrived in time to save him—and, yes, I had to admit to myself that I was almost, if not quite, as glad to have saved Nemesis.

"I was real mad," said Claude, joyously stepping along beside me—"I was real mad when I sounded the gong for breakfast, and you never showed up at all! And just as I was tearing out to see if you was never coming I heard Don howling his big head off down here. Says I to myself, 'Somethin's up, Claude Melnotte Raffarty, you may bet your life, and 'stead of raising Cain round here you'd just better waltz down to the shore and see. It's tramps, like as not!'

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

so down I run, and, Land o' Goshen, there you were in the midst of those raging billows saving a human life! Never have I experienced such shame! 'Claude,' I says to myself, 'you'd better do somethin' to help, 'stead of howlin' like poor Don, here!' So I skipped up to the stable like a house afire, and yelled to Jimmie Dolan to come quick, for there was wrecks off shore, and mercy me, here we be at the house already—and, dear me, I was forgettin' your wet things—do change 'em. I'll fetch you up somethin' hot when I bring the same to young St. J."

As for me, I thought of Nemesis—of Nemesis on the finger of a careless young man! I had imagined her guarded carefully in the velvet-lined drawer of some cabinet, treasured as a rare antique. There came a tap at my door. "Cup of coffee, Miss Dean! Hot as hot—you'll please drink it at once. Open your door on a crack which you can haul it in when I'm gone, which I'm goin' d'rectly, only please come down as soon as able to preside over the breakfast which I'm about to offer to our guest, Miss Dean."

I said I would come very soon.

"Can you hear me through the door, Miss Dean?"

"Yes, Claude."

"Then I just want to say," came through the key-hole in a hoarse but dramatic whisper, "that if R. St. J. acts queer, don't you mind. He's full to the brim with whiskey! My remonstrances met with no success, Miss Dean, though I went so far as to mention a lady's presence. His insides is copper-lined, that's evident. But don't you worry, Miss Dean, for it may go to his legs alone—and anyway I'll be there."

He tramped away heavily, to let me know that he was gone. I took in the coffee; it was hot and comforting.

When I went downstairs Mr. St. John, rising from

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

the divan on which he was lolling, came forward with both hands outstretched to greet me. This I failed to see, thinking an ordinary hand-shake quite sufficient. The whiskey had not gone to his legs.

Mr. St. John was tall and slender, small-featured, with pale blue eyes, and fair hair which curled closely about a very white forehead. As he smiled down upon me he showed a row of very perfect teeth, but his smile was disagreeable because of the scantiness of the upper lip, which disclosed much of its lining as it drew back, transforming the smile into a sneer.

"How can I thank you enough, Miss Dean," he said, in well-modulated tones, "for risking your valuable life to save my worthless one? I shall be, believe me, eternally grateful"—he squeezed my hand very hard and gazed tenderly into my eyes. I remembered the whiskey and made allowances. From the door of the dining-room came a discreet cough, betraying the presence of my self-elected chaperon. "I scarcely know what to say to you," he continued; but I cut him short by asking him to stay to breakfast. This he declined with effusive regrets.

"I should love above all things to breakfast with you, Miss Dean, but I must see to getting the boat in trim before my uncle, Mr. Beverley, of 'Beverley Towers,' gets wind of my adventure. I hope to keep the affair a secret from him, for he is old, Miss Dean"—with a look expressive of tender consideration for the aged—"and I should hate to have him upset, one upset being enough in a family, don't you think?"

Again remembering the whiskey I begged him to eat something before he left. The idea of so much liquor without food was appalling.

"Raffarty gave me a glass of milk, with a teaspoonful of whiskey in it, Miss Dean, to keep off cold, so I really don't need anything more. Erranti and I

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

are great chums, Miss Dean, and neighbors into the bargain, so I'll hope to see you often—when I'm not so deadily dull as I am now, after my soaking in that beastly ice-water," and, saying good-bye, he went away.

Claude at once bounced out of the dining-room in a whirlwind of indignation.

"A teaspoonful! A *teaspoonful*!" he exclaimed. "Well, if he ain't the greatest I ever saw! But it was just like him—just exactly like him! And milk, too! Not one drop of milk, Miss Dean, and so little water you couldn't scarcely see it! I don't mind sayin' to you, Miss Dean, that I ain't got no sort of use for that young man—he's the biggest fraud goin'. I hope to gracious you won't be deceived by his high-poceries."

In this fashion Claude ran on all the time I was eating my nice, hot breakfast. I did not know whether to stop him or not. I did not want to hurt his feelings. I had begun to like him. His familiarity was but the ease of one free-born American citizen toward another. No impertinence was intended. He was frankly and simply my equal. I said to myself, why not?

"What do you s'pose?" with a wild giggle of amusement, "he's goin' to be a minister! Leastways he's foolin' his old uncle up yonder," indicating Beverley Towers, with a motion of his curved thumb, "by pretending that he's goin' to be one. Him a minister! It would just make a ordinary cat laugh to think of it! Not but what he could play at bein' one good enough. Yes, he could. Mr. R. St. J., Miss Dean, is the best out-and-out mimic I ever saw! His talent is something extrordinary. Why, he can do the old Madam at her guitar to perfec—tion! You'd think 'twas her, playin' and singin'—and cussin', when she couldn't just remember—to the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

life! Kinder mean, too, I call it, makin' fun of a poor, loony old lady! You just bet he don't dare do it when the Boss is 'round! No sir-ree! He'd give him fits, the Boss would—though he only laughs when Mr. St. John mimics him! He does that good, too. He could mimic anyone. I'm always glad when he's 'round that *I* ain't peculiar. I'd sorter hate to have him take me off—folks laugh so."

IX

Two weeks had passed since my coming to Highgrove Hall. June, the month of roses, was nearly over. Mr. Erranti was still absent. I wished he would come home, for until then I might not enter upon my duties as housekeeper. The servants neglected their work. The bread was uneatable; often the shining floor of Madam's room was strewn with the bits thrown from her in disgust, yet she would not allow me to teach the cook or to make it myself.

"Wait till Philip returns to 'back you,' *ma chère*," she insisted, "though he may not wish to. Who dare say? He likes Norah's cooking, does Philip, but of her he has no fear—no, none at all; but then he fears not the devil himself—I saw him shoot the devil once! Hush, that I must not speak of; my head then grows hot, so hot! Norah is a devil, an Irish devil—I fear her. If Philip says, 'You may make bread, you may keep house!' he'll see you have your way. Philip never gives up, never, never, never!"

Madam was herself headstrong, imperious. I had to obey. I did not earn my salary. Free until ten in the morning, for an hour after luncheon, dismissed at nine in the evening, I was too idle, and wished for the return of Mr. Erranti, who, more courageous than most men, stood in no awe of his cook.

In the meantime I tried to find something to do. Books possess no attraction for me, but Mr. Erranti

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

had a fine library, and I knew I should take advantage of it. My mother had wished me to excel as a linguist, and I was forgetting every language save my own. I began to rub up my Italian by selecting a volume of short stories and reading one every morning. It was because of de Amicis that my friend the butler ceased to regard me as his equal. One morning he followed me to the library to complain of the dulness of Highgrove Hall.

"You see, before I came here, Miss Dean," he began in his plaintive drawl, "I lived the winter in town with Mr. Erranti. He only bought this place this last March because of the Madam's poor health, and he kept the ball a-rollin' lively, I can tell you! Stag-parties he called 'em, meaning only gentlemen present, and if I wished to pun I might say it did come very 'dear' to some of 'em. Cards?" ironically, with eyebrows raised, "Oh, no! not at all!" Then, very solemnly, "The way them brokers play for money, Miss Dean, is enough to turn your hair gray!"

I asked if Mr. Erranti was a stock broker.

"You may rest assured he is, Miss Dean," was the languid response—Claude's usual manner was languid—"and I'm thankful I ain't, that's all! A life of excitement wears me out," forgetting his complaint of its lack. "I was glad enough to come into a quiet neighborhood to rest. I was in a refreshment-room to a railway-station once. A place where you changed cars for everywhere most—a junction. My nerves couldn't stand the wear and tear of it, so I just lit out. Trains comin' in at all hours of the day, and over a hundred people all yellin' for different things at once. Only fifteen minutes for you to serve an' them to gobble the vittles down—all told! It was sickenin' to see the way folks forgot their manners. Behavin' like so many hogs!

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Hustlin', callin' names, an' swallerin' pieces of pie whole—I simply had to get out!" He broke off to inquire what I was going to read. "*I*-talian, did you say, Miss Dean? For the land's sake, can you read that queer gibberish? My! You'll be readin' Latin and Greek next—p'raps you do now?"

I smiled as I said I should be able to, seeing I had studied them until I was fourteen.

"Land o' Goshen!" Claude ejaculated, his air of languid indifference gone. "Did you attend night-school 'sides goin' daytimes? Seems to me you must have burned the candle to both ends, as the saying goes, to have learned so much by the time you was fourteen!"

I smiled, but remained silent, and Claude burst out:

"If you won't think me impertinent or—or—snooping, Miss Dean, I should like to know why you studied Greek. Was you thinkin' of being a teacher?"

"No," I said, "I never expected to teach;" then, thinking it could do no harm to gratify his burning curiosity: "You see, I was born in Greece, Claude, in Athens, so my mother wished me to understand the language of that country. I have never been to school. I studied at home. When I was fourteen my father was not able to give me teachers, for we had become very poor. I don't know so much as I should—only a few languages."

"Well, I never!" murmured the butler.

"Please don't repeat this, Claude. It hurts me to talk of the past."

"Not for worlds, Miss Dean."

He had become very solemn and pale, being the kindest, most sympathetic of creatures. After a long silence he sighed and said, in low, mournful tones:

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I feel proud to have been thus far honored of your confidence, Miss Dean. If it ain't cheeky I'd like to ask one question."

I smiled an assent.

"Did you know that Julie Cray before you came here?"

"Yes."

"And—and, as how, Miss Dean?"

"She was my mother's maid," I said, thoughtlessly, and was sorry the moment after.

"H-um! That accounts!" was the mysterious comment, as Claude gently withdrew.

This conversation changed his attitude toward me. He was still my friend, but, because of my education, my very humble friend. For good birth Claude cared nothing, being, indeed, incapable of seeing any difference between well-bred people and the vulgar rich. The finely clad were all "gentle people" to poor Claude. I have since noticed that the children born in this country of Irish parents are totally lacking in the subtle penetration which characterizes their parents. The newly arrived immigrant recognizes at once the "raal quality." Their children born on American soil, never.

But Claude, though he had no respect for old families, fairly revered knowledge, and he chose to think me very learned. When, by dint of questioning, he discovered that, besides French, Greek, and Latin, I understood German and Spanish, his admiration knew no bounds.

"And yet," he would occasionally say, in a burst of confidence, "you can't play the pie-anner! It does beat all! I b'lieve you could good enough if you only tried, and this house is just stuffed full of 'em!"

This last was quite true—the Hall was overfull of pianos and mirrors. They were everywhere, and

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

there was enough music in the house without my "trying." Poor Madam Erranti had days when she was haunted by music she had played when young. Opening her piano, she would sit for hours striving to recall old pieces, forgotten exercises, even scales, till my heart ached for her. She could not learn the new music—arranged for children—that her son brought her. The poor, bewildered brain could master nothing new, and its power over old knowledge was gone.

It was my most trying duty to sit beside Madam while she tried to practice, a bright, pink spot flaming in each cheek, her eyes sparkling feverishly, the knotted, swollen hands wandering over the keys, seeking vainly for the melody they might never again call forth. At such times she complained bitterly of her son's absence.

"I love much," she would say in French, the language she preferred, "the music that fills the house when Philip is at home. He sings like a nightingale. Didst ever hear the song of the nightingale? Yes? I, never, never in my life; but I am told the bird sings less well than my Philip. Listen, *belle et bonne*. I will tell thee of his voice. It is rich, sweet, tender, pathetic, and—passionately!" emphasizing each adjective with a pat of her hand against my cheek. Then, lowering her voice and nodding her head with energy, "If ever Philip sings of love to a woman he will wile away her heart; yes, her poor, sick, feverish, weary heart! Not thine, *très chère*, ah, no! Thou shalt not listen; if thou didst, what matter after all? *Ma foi*"—smiling, patting my cheek again—"what matter, I ask? Thou art an ice-maiden, a Lorelei, as cold as—as you appear! Have I not seen thee with young Randal, whose life was saved by thy efforts? Is he not charming, winning—of an intelligence ex-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

treme? I, an old woman, admire him, while you, young, without experience, therefore to be pleased easily, regard him without favor! Cold, indifferent, unmoved by his efforts to please! And he tries to please, the young Randal, tries hard! Oh, I see, I see—tries hard—in vain! I admire thy hard heart,” she added, in a mysterious whisper, “and I am glad!”

Leaning forward, she kissed me; leaning back, smiled with strange approval.

A very singular old lady, but she was kind in her whimsical, selfish way.

Randal St. John did spend much of his time with us. For a few days after his ducking he was kept at home by a feverish cold, but when he recovered he almost lived at the Hall. He strolled about the garden, lounged on the veranda, strummed on the pianos, and was generally on hand when Madam went for an airing in her wheeled chair, when he walked beside her. An idle young man, he found Madam amusing.

I did not like him, and avoided him when I could. He wearied me with his nonsense, talking almost exclusively about himself and me, discussing, comparing, and commenting upon what he called “our complex natures,” till I was fain to wish neither of us had ever been born!

X

Madam Erranti's feelings toward her son were of a variable nature. Some days she would seem very proud of him, boasting of his beauty, superb voice, strength of character, and fine education. Yet it seemed to me the deep affection felt by most mothers for an only child was lacking. Her sentiment appeared rather a compound of pride, admiration, and wondering awe. The days when this feeling swayed her I learned to call her good days.

On her bad days his name might not be mentioned. It was as if she hated to be reminded of his existence. She would close her eyes and turn her head away if he were even distantly alluded to. Julie told me that if the subject were pursued Madame had, later, "an attack of the nerves." It did not escape my notice that Julie availed herself of this peculiarity to avenge herself for slights received. I remembered her praises of Mr. Erranti on the day of my arrival, after Madame had insulted her by the epithets "pig" and "imbecile."

Unfortunately, Mr. Erranti chose to return on one of his mother's bad days. The letter announcing his coming arrived late, not till noon, owing to the carelessness of the men about going for the mail during their master's absence. I had been called a half-hour earlier to Madam's room that morning than was customary, and found her very

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

irritable and hard to please. Seated in her wheeled chair, clad in a morning-gown of lilac silk a-flutter with lace and ribbons, her white-lace cap gay with a fresh pink rose, she was amusing herself playing with her many handsome rings. These she could not wear because of her swollen fingers. She acknowledged my salutation on entering, coldly, and when I asked if I should read to her or get my embroidery she did not answer, but broke out into peevish complaints.

"*Mon Dieu!* No one loves me! Ah, that I were dead! The bread that one gives me to eat is disgusting. The *femme de chambre* who serves me is a fool—of a wicked temper, without heart; and thou, Athena, for whom I have affection, deniest me the small thing I ask of thee, and demand, 'Shall I read? Shall I sew?' I tell thee no, no, no!"

"Dear Madam," I asked, gently, "what is it you wish? I am anxious to please you."

She turned her head away, saying, "But no, thou wilt not consent. I have asked thee again and yet again. It is always 'No!' Thou art beautiful, but cruel. Thou hast no heart!"

This meant that I refused to wear her rings, an old grievance. That I might not do so because I could not replace a gem should I lose one she thought no reason, arguing that the rings were hers, to throw away even, should she see fit. Why might she not wear them by proxy? I could not yield, and she would not, returning on her bad days to the charge.

"I am sorry," I said; "think of something else I might do for you, Madam."

Her brown eyes twinkled with malicious mischief.

"Go, then, to the green door in the wall and wait the coming of young Randal. I like him well, the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

young Randal. He is always amiable and polite. Say to him he shall accompany me in my promenade. Go quickly, my child."

Julie looked at me and shrugged her shoulders despairingly. Following me to the door she whispered, "Mademoiselle will not go there alone! But, no. Pretend only, and return."

I did not answer. She opened the door for me; she seemed very eager to advise.

"It is not *comme il faut!*" she whispered. "Monsieur is young, and Mademoiselle also!"

"It does not matter, Julie, and it may quiet Madame."

The woman's handsome eyes flashed.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed, "what folly! But these Americans—they are all the same. Barbarians!"

Stepping from the veranda, I struck into a path skirting the knoll, which rose above the house to the east, and was soon in the belt of woodland dividing the lands of the Hall and Beverley Towers. Don, rising lazily from his nap on the veranda, trotted after me, his clumsy, puppy feet scuff-scuffing along the gravel in slovenly fashion. It was a beautiful but intensely hot day, and the heat brought out the sweet scents of the woods. Few sunbeams contrived to shoot their quivering darts through the thick network of leaves overhead, and, in contrast to the outside world, the little forest seemed cool. It was refreshing, and I caught myself hoping that Mr. St. John might be long in coming.

The path divided at the summit of the hill, sweeping to right and left. Following the left division I found myself before the green door in the high brick wall which was our boundary line. Opening it I peeped through. The path descended rapidly, and I heard, far below me, the musical tinkle of a

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

brook, but I saw nothing save trees and ferns and mosses. Returning to the top of the knoll I seated myself, carefully, for fear of staining my pretty new frock, on a moss-cushioned rock, and waited for Mr. St. John.

I had three new frocks, all white, however—two filmy muslins and one silk, this last yellowed by its long retirement in one of Madam's chests. They were oddly made, Madam's fancy being followed instead of the fashion of the year.

"Open at the throat, Julie, and flowing sleeves—angel sleeves—and yes, plaits, Watteau plaits, falling from between the shoulders; a train, yes, for Athena has dignity—and plenty, plenty, plenty of lace and embroidery!"

Distinctly a livery it was, an absurd one for the wearing of a companion and housekeeper!

I had not waited long before I heard the door click to sharply, and presently Mr. St. John lounged into sight. As he saw me he called out, in his gentle voice:

"You here, Miss Dean! What a pleasant surprise! I wish I dared hope you came to meet me. What"—to Don, who, hair bristling, teeth bared, and growling fiercely, had planted himself before me—"don't you know me, you young goose? That pup dislikes me, Miss Dean, and I can't imagine why. Can you? No, don't get up," as I moved, "it's lovely and cool here, and hotter than thunder everywhere else. I vote we spend the morning in the woods." But I was already upon my feet. "You are the strangest girl I ever met," he spoke, peevishly; "you don't care a button what I say to you. Most women like me awfully. Their gentle hearts go out to me!"

I laughed. Mr. St. John behaved like a spoiled child.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"My heart is a jog-trot, stay-at-home organ," I said, walking on swiftly; "it seldom stirs abroad."

"Well, you needn't run, at any rate," seizing one of my braids as he spoke, and bringing me to a standstill. "I like hair braided *à la Marguerite*."

I turned and looked at him, and, as his eyes met mine, he dropped the braid he held as if it were a snake. I resumed my former rapid pace.

"Yet she came to meet me!" in plaintive soliloquy, following closely at my heels; "and now I venture merely to touch one of the rays of sunshine hanging down her graceful back and she turns into a Medusa! I'm very hot, and I'm not at all strong, yet I have to walk as if the thermometer were below zero, and circulation had to be promoted at any cost! Miss Dean—sweet Miss Dean—gentle spirit—stay!"

We had arrived at the house. Madam was not in her room, so I went on to the garden, Randal walking beside me.

"Are you mad yet?" he inquired, smiling at me ingratiatingly.

"No," I said, calmly; "I suppose you can't help your nature."

His innocent blue eyes had an odd expression as they scanned my face.

"Madam sent me for you," I continued. "She is not very well to-day."

"And I am to soothe her troubled mind, I suppose. To please you I will try."

I made no answer, but entered the garden. This was large and exquisitely neat, a charming place, set in a frame of greenery. Above its walls waved the trees of the encircling woodland, and the walls themselves were hidden beneath the vines and fruit-trees that they upheld. In its centre a giant basin of stone, circled by white-trunked birch-trees, was

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

filled to the brim with a bubbling spring of limpid water, in whose cool shallows gold-fish darted gayly. Under the birch-trees were rustic benches, a pleasant lounging-place in hot weather, and here we found Madam in her wheeled chair.

"You have been gone a very long time," she cried, as we drew near, "a very long time indeed! Well, sir," to Randal, who lifted her hand to his lips as he greeted her, "well, sir, what have you got to say for yourself? Did you linger on the road, *mauvais sujet*?"

"It was cool in the woods, dear Madam,"—a swift side glance at me; "we could not hurry back into the heat. How sweet you look with that rose in your hair! May I have it by and by to keep as a souvenir?"

"It is not in my hair but in my cap," said Madam, peevishly, "and if you stayed long in the woods you stayed alone. You had best speak the truth to me. People try to deceive me in vain. Miss Dean never tries, that is why I love her. I love her dearly."

"So do I," murmured Randal; "you and I always agree, dear Madam."

Julie was standing behind her mistress, her hands on the pushing-bar of the chair. At this moment she jerked it suddenly, by accident, I supposed. Not so thought Madam, but turned fiercely upon her maid, her eyes bright with anger.

"Go away, you spiteful French cat!" she shrieked; "go to the servants' hall and scratch your equals! What, you stand listening behind backs to discover our secrets! Eavesdropper, jealous fool, begone!"

Julie, her usually impassive face distorted with anger, darted away and vanished through the gate.

"I'm tired of it here, Randal," said Madam; "call Dolan, and go with me down the avenue."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Dolan, a sad-faced young Irishman, came hastily at the summons, and we were soon in the cool shade of the avenue, less melancholy on sunny, summer mornings than at other times.

"Athena is so quiet," complained the older lady; "she never talks at all."

"She is a sphinx—and a Medusa," said Randal, smiling across Madam's head at me.

"She is a very beautiful girl, but old Pat doesn't like her. I hate old Pat, but he keeps the gate locked tight and fast so they can't get in, even if they try."

"Who can't get in?" asked Randal, curiously.

"You are a rude, inquisitive young man," was the reply; "send him home, Athena, I'm tired of him."

"Oh, no you're not," said Randal, gently; "I'm going to be very attractive and entertaining. I want to see old Pat."

When we arrived at the gate-house we saw its custodian cutting grass on his tiny lawn; but, pretending not to see us, he hastened around the corner of the lodge and disappeared.

"Do you hear wheels?" asked Madam. She looked scared. We all listened. There was nothing to be heard.

"Pat!" shouted Randal, "will you come and see Madam, or must I come and fetch you?"

Dolan chuckled as old Pat slowly limped into sight, and, gruffly saluting his mistress, stood awaiting orders. He was a surly, sour-faced man; a very Cerberus.

"Yes," said Madam, speaking to herself, and quite unaware that she was overheard, "he is a dreadful old man! A gatekeeper for the devil! I am sure he will go to hell by and by. The devil will find him useful!" Then, very graciously, and as if speaking for the first time, "How do you do, good Patrick? You look faithful and true. Keep

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

the gate carefully, good Patrick, and I will come again to see you. Home, Dolan, home! Good-by, good old man," again to herself. "An evil old ruffian, I hate the sight of him! Hurry, Dolan, hurry," turning to the man, "I want to get home."

The subject of this strange speech scowled angrily after us. Randal and Dolan had, during the interview, been at no pains to conceal their amusement, thus adding to Pat's discomfiture. I was sorry for him; but in my sympathy I stood alone.

We had reached the stables on our way home when Madam suddenly called a halt.

"Dolan," she said, "I must go back. I forgot to give old Pat orders to admit no one."

"Sure, you told him that same when we was there," remonstrated Dolan, unwilling to retrace his steps.

"I want to say to him," continued the old lady, as if Dolan had not spoken, "Patrick, in case ladies come to call, say to them very respectfully, 'Madam Erranti regrets that the delicate state of her health prevents her receiving visitors.' Hurry back, Dolan. People may come before I can tell him. Hurry, I say."

But Dolan was obdurate. "Best go home, ma'am," he said, comfortably, "it's getting toward noon. It's tired out you'll be; an' as for them orders, sure you've give them to Pat twinty times an' more. See them gray squ-urls beyant! They're dancin' to plaze you!"

Madam looked at the pretty little creatures scampering away into the thicket, but reiterated obstinately that she would "go back, go back, go back!"

Randal next tried his powers of persuasion.

"Dear Madam Erranti"—he used his gentlest tones—"pray don't over-tire yourself. Erranti'll never forgive us if we allow you to overdo. That

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

handsome son of yours is capable of scalping the lot of us if we let you get sick. He may be home at any moment now! Do think of him!"

At the first mention of her son's name she turned her head away and closed her eyes. I tried in vain to stop the flow of Randal's eloquence. He did not—or would not—see my signals; but however unwelcome his words were to Madam they served their purpose.

"Athena," she said, when he had finished speaking, opening her eyes again, "Athena, I want to go home. I am tired. I want my luncheon. I want my nap, and," turning sharply upon Randal, "I want to be alone. You had better go home. Go home and study something. You have no tact; go home and study tact—tact, tact, tact! Do you hear, Randal St. John? Good-bye!"

He smiled, and taking his departure preceded us to the Hall. There Julie met him, and I saw they spoke earnestly together. Then he vanished around the corner of the house, and Julie, her good temper apparently quite restored, came to meet us, and made herself agreeable to her mistress. Later, when Madam had been made comfortable in her cool, darkened room, Julie, motioning me to follow, slipped into the hall.

"Mademoiselle," she said, taking a letter from her pocket, "behold a letter from Monsieur! What shall I do? I dare not give it to Madame at present, but—it must be read. Perhaps he returns to-day, even, and we must know to make preparation. Will Mademoiselle read it? Why not! Mademoiselle is already as a daughter to Madame——"

Covert impertinence lurked in her manner, usually so respectful. Slow of speech, I did not answer at once. When I did I ignored her insolent suggestion, saying only that the letter might be

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

given Madame after her nap, when, it was to be hoped, she might have recovered her serenity—and then turned my back upon Julie. My duties were over for the morning.

After luncheon I settled myself in a great basket-work chair on the veranda for an hour's reading. I opened my book with an effort, feeling I should improve my mind—my lazy mind refused to be improved. Then, a tall, slim young man lounged into sight, on the path from the knoll, and in another moment had stretched himself on the edge of the veranda at my feet, his back against a pillar, a cigarette between his teeth.

"I may smoke, serene-eyed lady?"

"Yes;" and, after a moment of silence, "I wonder you felt like a stroll so early in the afternoon; I thought you found the heat disagreeable."

"If any other member of the fair sex had made that remark," said Randal, "I should think she yearned for a compliment from yours truly. I came because I find your lofty presence cooling—not to say freezing."

No reply being necessary, I made none. Mr. St. John smoked industriously for some time, in silence, then he said, smiling so broadly that a great deal of the lining of his upper lip came in view, "Grandma was in a fearful state of wax this morning, wasn't she? A dear old lady! So gentle, with such winning ways! Why does she call you 'Athena'? Because you look like a goddess? I never see you that I don't think of who-do-you-call-him's lines:

Solemn and sweet was her smile, and their hearts beat
loud at her coming!

"My heart always beats loud at your coming. I often wonder you don't hear it! You're such a

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

queer, silent, reserved girl! I defy anyone to make out what you hear and see, and what you don't. Erranti may. He's a queer Dick, himself."

"I wish he would come home."

"Why?" asked Randal, greedy curiosity in his blue eyes.

"I wish to keep house," I said, seriously; "I haven't enough to do."

"Well, you are a queer girl! I wonder if Erranti will—well, never mind what. Anyone told you about him?"

"Only his mother."

Randal leaned back against his pillar, blowing a thin wreath of smoke from his lips. "I feel largely, generously conversational," he said; "to tell the truth, that's why I happened in. I knew the old tigress would be asleep, and you probably here. I feel like telling you 'all, all, everything!' Here goes for a portrait of Erranti. Ask what questions you choose, but please keep awake!"

He lighted another cigarette—he smoked incessantly—and Nemesis flashed grandly as he lifted his left hand.

"You're looking at my ring, Miss Dean. A beauty, isn't it? My beloved uncle has lent me the loan of it for a year. If during that time I abstain from my pet weakness, the ring becomes mine. Won't you look at it?" drawing it from his finger and offering it to me. "It's Nemesis. The jewels are splendid. Come to think of it, Nemesis is not unlike you. Just turn your head a little, will you? Yes, the profile is almost the same. Strange I never noticed it before!"

"You were speaking of Mr. Erranti," I said, giving back—with what reluctance!—my mother's ring.

"Erranti?" slipping it on his finger with a sigh. A very white finger, but with an ugly pink lurking

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

under the whiteness. "Erranti—oh, yes! Well, here's his portrait, and you'll see at once that he's almost as handsome as you and I, only he's dark, and I prefer blonds myself. Erranti is tall, and his figure just about perfect. Broad shoulders, small hands and feet, well-shaped head. Carries himself splendidly. He don't strike one as tall somehow, he's so confoundedly well-made. Awfully graceful chap, and as romantic-looking as the dickens! Not that he knows what that word means. I believe he could play the very deuce with the women if he wanted to, but he don't care a rap about them," and Mr. St. John sank into meditative silence.

"What does Mr. Erranti care for?" I asked.

"Money," was the prompt response; "money—and games of chance."

"You mean stocks?"

"I mean games of chance of every kind."

I remembered Claude's description of the card-parties in town.

"The beggar has a handsome face, too," Randal went on; "splendid eyes—dark, long, gleaming. Hair like black velvet—wears it cropped close; too short, you know. Skin's dark—tanned a deep brown—but it's clear and smooth. He wears gorgeous togs. I like giddy garments. You wear fetching raiment, Miss Dean."

"Please finish the portrait."

"Oh, well, let's see—nose? Delicate aquiline; chin, stunning, cleft in it! His sole defect is his mouth—his lips are awfully full, I think, but some fellows don't object to 'em. Men admire Erranti, you know. There's nothing he can't do—all 'round chap, so to speak."

"Tell me now of your uncle, Mr. Beverley," I said; "are you to live with him always?"

Randal sighed. "I'm sure I don't know," he

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

said, "and I wish I did. Sometimes I feel I'm settled for life, sometimes I know I'm on trial still. Uncle B.'s a bachelor, and he has a pile of tin to leave! Grandpapa left him and his two sisters plenty to begin with, but my mother would marry my father, you see, and he, a good fellow no doubt, but a merry, merry artist, let the money slip through his fingers. My parents died when I was a tiny child, Miss Dean. Had my mother lived I might be a better sort of chap."

He sighed again, and, opening the back of his watch, handed it to me, saying, "My mother's picture."

It was a faded likeness of a small-featured, pretty woman, Randal, without Randal's disagreeable expression. I admired the gentle face, and then asked about the other sister—Richard Thorpe's mother; she was in my thought.

"Both sisters married cousins, Miss Dean. A mistake, I think—narrows down the family connections. When Uncle Thorpe died—for die he did—she was goose enough to marry again, and a foreigner into the bargain, a fat German baron! It was partly her son's fault, though. Dick Thorpe's the most obstinate chap I ever saw! Wouldn't live abroad with his mother, and enjoy life, loitering around Europe. No, sir, not he! Cut up an awful shindy when he was fourteen! Swore he was an American, born and bred, and he must come home—and work! 'Stars and Stripes! My Country, 'tis of Thee! Columbia's the Gem of the Ocean!'—that sort of rot. Oh, yes; home he came, and to work he went—all the uncles backing him up no end. His mother promptly gave her hand—and her yearly stipend—to Baron Fat German—I forget his name this minute."

I listened with deep interest. It was the first

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

time Randal had ever spoken of his cousin. Still very grateful to Mr. Thorpe for his kindness, still unaccountably hurt by his later neglect, I thought of him much more often than was wise, and listened with controlled eagerness to all Randal had to say.

"Dick's a good-natured chap," he continued, "but queer. Sharp as a razor in a business way, and bound to get on, because of his frightful obstinacy; yet"—he laughed gently, then said, in his sweetest tones—"a very foolish fellow, after all. Uncle B. wanted him to study for the ministry—the old man is a bigoted Episcopalian—and Dicky had scruples! Said he wasn't good enough! Stuck to the law, and lost his chance of coming in for Beverley Towers and a pot of money!"

"And you?"

"Oh, I'm grateful to the old chap for paying my bills in the past, so I mean to make him happy in his own way by studying for the ministry, when I'm in better health."

In spite of his sweet, sad expression Mr. St. John failed to impress me by this generous devotion to his uncle's wishes.

"I'm twenty-two," he said, presently. "I know I don't look it."

I thought he did, but was silent.

"Three years older than you, Miss Dean;" and his eyes said, "Ask me how I know."

I did not gratify him, and, Claude appearing in search of me, our interview was over.

"You're in for a terrible time, Miss Dean, I'm 'fraid," said Claude, as I followed him into the hall. His brow was dark with care—he had ostentatiously ignored Mr. St. John's presence upon the veranda, pretending not to see him—and he had retreated into the house immediately after summoning me. "Looks as if the old lady was goin' to have one of

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

her screechin' fits. Julie, she's read her a letter from the Boss. He's comin' up the river on his yacht some time this evening—time not known! I'm to sit up for him. What that French woman's said or done I don't know, but Madam is raisin' Cain in there. The fat's got into the fire some way or 'nother. You can hear it sizzlin' through the door!" pointing toward that object with his flexible thumb, and adding, as he opened it for me, in a dramatic whisper, "You'd better watch out!"

It was as he said. Madam Erranti was in a painfully excited condition. I soon found that it was because of me she so dreaded her son's arrival. He had really engaged me as housekeeper, and Madam had herself prevented me from assuming my duties as such. She feared, too, that he might disapprove of my rich toilettes, yet she would not permit me to exchange the fine gown of her providing for one of my own simple ones. A strange old lady, sometimes as easy to understand as a wayward child, at others concealing her thoughts with the cunning said to accompany insanity.

A fresh breeze, springing up at five o'clock, did us all good—while it lasted—quieting Madam's over-excited nerves; but it died away after supper, and there followed an ominous stillness, betokening storm. By nine the atmosphere had become almost stifling, and Madam, allowing Julie to put her to bed as usual, commanded us both to remain with her and to amuse her.

"I am afraid," she said, "I feel thunder in the air. Divert me, you two light-hearted young people, quick, divert me!"

We eyed each other helplessly, Julie and I. Since three o'clock we had striven to amuse, to distract her mind.

"If you could only make music, Athena," she

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

cried, fretfully; "but thou art good to look at only. Thou canst do—nothing, nothing, nothing!"

She was quite right, I could do nothing.

"Shall I read to you?" I faltered, ashamed of my incompetence.

"No! I am weary of thy reading. Go, put on the gown of white silk. Julie shall do thy hair *à la mode*."

Hastening to my room I obeyed, glancing from time to time with dread at the ink-black sky. Suddenly a low growl of thunder, like the snarl of a wild beast about to spring, stirred the heavy atmosphere. I ran swiftly back to Madam's brilliantly lighted room. How might she endure that threatening sound! She sat up in bed, fingers in ears, when I entered, but withdrawing them at sight of me ordered Julie to rearrange my hair. I seated myself obediently before the dressing-table, and Julie, throwing a peignoir over my shoulders, unbraided my hair and shook it free. Hardly had she done so when there came a clap of thunder so violent and terrible that I started to my feet in alarm, and with it an almost blinding flash of lightning, its blue glare dominating the rosy lamp-light.

Uttering scream after scream, Madam Erranti writhed in terror upon her bed, one moment striving to bury her head in the pillows, the next staring about her with wild, awful eyes, as if expecting to see horrible things lurking in the corners of her gay, luxurious room. Julie, her courage gone, cowered on the floor, and cried aloud on God to save her, for the storm was upon us in all its strength. During an hour it raged about Highgrove Hall, as if with intent to destroy both house and inmates; but it was as nothing when compared with the tempest of fear and agony that racked the half-crazed brain of Madam Erranti. Deeply pitying her suf-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

fering I did what little I could to soothe her, but without avail. To prevent her springing from her bed in her mad efforts to escape the horror which pursued her, I was obliged to hold her close within my arms, and, at times, to exert all my strength to prevent her wresting herself free.

"Hush!" she would whisper, when there was a momentary cessation of the uproar without, "hush! do you hear them coming—or is it only the wind in the trees? Ah, what was that?" holding herself rigid to listen. Then, as the storm broke loose again, came the wild cry, "The dogs! The dogs!—they are coming! Philip, Philip, Philip—save me!" striving, after, to free herself from my encircling arms, with a wild frenzy that made me uncertain whether it were best to loose or hold her, fearing she might, in either case, do herself serious mischief.

After such a paroxysm had passed she would hide her head on my shoulder, and, drawing my loosened hair over her, would bid me keep very still, that they might pass us by.

"He has sharp eyes," she would murmur, "and he is very cunning, but these tangled vines hang close. I wish Philip would not leave me so long alone."

Another moment she would recognize me, and remember where she was; but before I had time to congratulate myself on her being herself again, she would again cry out that the dogs were baying close at hand. This lasted until nearly eleven o'clock, when, the storm ceasing as suddenly as it had begun, she fell asleep from exhaustion. She lay beside me on the bed, her arms about my neck, her head pillowed on my shoulder. I dared not move for fear of awakening her. From the floor came the sound of heavy snoring, where, in the farthest corner, Julie lay. Soon I, too, slept, but

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

not peacefully. I was troubled with horrid dreams, owing to the trying scene I had just experienced, and also because my arm, on which Madam Erranti rested, was becoming cramped. Her weight lay heavy upon it, and I was tired.

I dreamed I was in some jungle or tropical swamp. Underfoot grew tangled grasses and rankly luxuriant ferns. The earth, wet and black, seemed anxious to suck me down. Overhead, branches and vines had woven themselves into a close, dark canopy, shutting out light and air and sunshine. Behind me, at the foot of a gigantic tree-trunk, crouched Madam Erranti, trembling with fear, for advancing toward us, through lush grasses and nodding fern, came two great dogs—Siberian bloodhounds. Even in my dream I wondered that I feared two creatures belonging to the canine race; but in the eyes of these so stealthily advancing upon me there was none of the intelligence belonging to their dog brothers—these were wild beasts.

I thought Madam called to warn me of our danger, and because I did not answer, fancied me unaware of the dogs' approach. In reality I made no sign, because I was absorbed in preparation for the coming struggle. I could fight but one—which one? My hands, trained to activity and usually so strong, felt strangely weak. I looked anxiously at the beasts as they drew nearer, staring at me with dreadful, glaring eyes, striving to decide which was the stronger of the two. In the eyes of the smaller there was an expression of slyness, of furtive doubt. Should I conquer his companion, he would run. I dreamed I turned, with a feeling of relief, to examine the larger dog—and shuddered. The look which met mine from those strange, blood-shot eyes made me sick with horror—the look of a devil! I braced myself for the coming struggle, for I knew

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

which dog I must fight—and I was at bay. If but my hands would obey, and squeeze the breath from that ugly throat—or beat out those devilish brains—or— He was close upon me—I sprang forward—ah!

I was again in Madam's bright room, and awake. At the foot of the bed two men were standing—Claude, staring with an expression of intense scorn at the prostrate form of the snoring Frenchwoman, and a tall, handsome man, with long, gleaming, dark eyes. He was scrutinizing me closely. I tried to move, but could not—Madam still lay within my arms. The dark eyes understood my difficulty. Instantly their owner moved to Madam's side, and, lifting her with the gentleness possible only to those who possess great strength, laid her among her pillows. Still I was powerless to rise, and I did not wonder when, the clock on the mantelpiece chiming half-past three, I realized that I had held Madam over four hours. Mr. Erranti, for I had at once recognized him, saw my predicament also, and, lifting me firmly and gently from the bed, placed me on my feet. I murmured my thanks and slipped from the room, where I was no longer needed. Claude was rousing Julie with no gentle hand!

As I reached the first landing of the great staircase I heard a step behind me, and turning saw the master of Highgrove Hall close at my elbow.

"I fear you are tired out, Miss Dean," he said, and his beautiful dark face wore an expression of great kindness; "may I send you a glass of wine?"

Thanking him, I assured him that I needed no refreshment. "I am very strong," I said.

"Raffarty has told me, Miss Dean, what I owe to your kindness. He saw your tender care of my poor mother, this evening. Believe me, I am grate-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ful. I knew she was happy in your companionship, but it was left for me to learn to-night that she had found a guardian angel," and, raising my hand to his lips in old-time fashion, Mr. Erranti bowed low, and was gone.

Turning to continue my way upstairs, I chanced to glance at the statue of the Medicean Venus in her niche above the landing. The flickering light from the hall lamps played strange tricks with her handsome, sensual features. The full lips seemed twisted into an ugly smile. I shivered. Someone was "walking over my grave." I hurried to my room and to bed.

XI

I was up betimes the next morning—a bright, fair morning after the storm. The river, blue and gay in the early morning sunshine, danced merrily. The tree-tops rustled fresh and green. It was as if the storm of the night, with its attendant horrors, had been but a dream. I enjoyed the feeling of homely ease and comfort that the day brought.

On my table lay the last volume borrowed from the library—a richly but gravely bound little book: “Locke’s Essay of the Conduct of the Understanding.” This, I had hoped, might benefit my understanding, together with the Essays by Francis Bacon—Baron Verulam, Viscount St. Alban, and Lord High Chancellor of England—which were in the same book. The two wise men, Locke and Bacon, hunting in couples, as it were! It occurred to me that Mr. Erranti might object to my reading his books. This thought worried me, and picking up the little book—so light to carry, so heavy to read—I ran downstairs and into the library, never dreaming I should find it occupied. I was the one early riser in Highgrove Hall. In the window stood its owner and Claude.

Claude was talking earnestly. He had the air of a person engaged in the performance of a solemn duty. His very apron seemed to say, “It is our duty, and we will.” He emphasized his remarks with the large feather duster, which he always carried in the mornings.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"You may not care to hear what I now say to you," said the duster, "but hear it you shall."

Mr. Erranti, handsomer than ever in his suit of spotless white duck, stood listening with an air of patient submission. Claude was, when once embarked on the flood of his own eloquence, not to be stopped easily; but when I entered he ceased abruptly, looking so caught and conscious that I knew I was the subject of his discourse. On the stage Claude would have made an excellent conspirator; the youngest, dullest boy in the most distant part of the house would have known from his expression that he was conspiring.

Mr. Erranti, an amused smile lurking about the corners of his mouth, came forward to meet me. The guilty Claude beat a hasty retreat.

"I hope you feel none the worse for the fatigue of last night, Miss Dean," said my employer, kindly. "No? I am very glad. You don't look tired, but like the morning itself—so fresh and bright and fair!"

I explained my errand to the library.

"Ah!"—taking the book from my hand and glancing at the title—"you like these Essays?"

"No," I said, simply, "I find them wearisome."

"Then—if I may ask—why read them?"

I thought the question absurd. "To improve my mind."

"You are fond of reading, Miss Dean?"

"No," and I sighed, ashamed that I had to give such an answer.

"Only of novels, perhaps?"

I shook my head. "I like to listen to reading, and," remembering my duties as companion, "I don't mind reading aloud."

Mr. Erranti looked at me curiously.

"When you do feel inclined to improve your

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

mind, as you are pleased to call it—I doubt very much if there is any room for improvement myself.” (I bowed.)—“Pray remember that my small collection is quite at your disposal.”

I thanked him and turned to go, but begging me to remain for a moment, he placed a chair for me and seated himself opposite. For an instant I thought I was to be scolded, then I saw that the dark face wore a very friendly expression. It was a very remarkably handsome face, in spite of the too full lips, as Randal had said; with something odd and foreign-looking about it—and the man. Mr. Erranti used few gestures when talking, and his face was—almost always—as expressionless as a mask, yet I knew instinctively that if he let himself go, both face and hands would tell his thoughts plainly to all the world. His was a cultivated composure, and I, because I was really cold, slow-thinking, and calm, recognized it as such.

“I wish to apologize to you, Miss Dean,” he began, “for the burden laid upon you last night. When I learned from Raffarty that all care and responsibility had been thrown upon you, I was very angry. It is Julie’s business to look after Madam Erranti when she is suffering. I have spoken to the woman. She won’t forget her duties again.”

“She was badly frightened by the storm,” I said, gently. “She lost her head, poor thing.”

“And you, Miss Dean, you were not frightened?”

“Not by the storm.”

“Ah!” Mr. Erranti rose abruptly, and, going to the window, stood with his back toward me, looking out. “Raffarty tells me my mother had one of her worst attacks last night. Did she talk wildly?” turning swiftly and eyeing me keenly. “Were you terrified by what she said?”

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I feared she might hurt herself. The thunder and lightning gave her nightmare fancies."

"That is it," he spoke with some eagerness, "nightmare fancies, nothing more. My mother has had much trouble in her life, many sorrows to endure. Ten years ago she was very ill. She has never been the same since. Sometimes she is not quite herself. Her mind—but you were with her last night, and understand. Poor child! How white you looked as you lay beside her, your protecting arms around her! As white and fragile as a lily—a lily flooded in sunshine—the sunshine of your golden hair!"

I had been looking past Mr. Erranti out upon the summer sweetness of trees and river. At this high-flown speech I turned my eyes full upon him. He smiled faintly, but appeared neither embarrassed nor discomfited. Evidently he had not meant to be impertinent. He was, as Randal had said, very romantic looking, the kind of person whose ordinary conversation might be expected to be flowery, highfalutin, romantic. I wondered if Erranti *père* had been an Italian.

"I am very strong, Mr. Erranti—rarely tired. But I should tell you at once that I am slow-witted. I was worried last night that I did not know how to calm Madam. I was stupid about it—that is the truth."

To my surprise he appeared pleased, smiling kindly and approvingly upon me.

"You don't look dull, Miss Dean, but very intelligent. One might, I think, call you large-minded. Your great gray eyes are so passionless—so calm."

Deciding that Erranti *père* had been a Spaniard, I rose to go, but again Mr. Erranti stopped me.

"Oh, by the way, Miss Dean. will you be so very

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

kind as to continue to preside at my table while the Hall is empty? Later I shall have a raft of men coming, when you'll be more comfortable in your own room, but at present——"

"Certainly, if you wish," I said, and I colored. Until that moment I had forgotten that housekeepers always eat and live in the "Housekeeper's Room."

Waiting in the garden for the breakfast-gong to sound, I reflected that I did not even know if there were a housekeeper's room at the Hall! I was ashamed. Mr. Erranti had every right to regard me as an impudent upstart, returning to find the new housekeeper dressed in lace and silk, and taking her meals in the dining-room! Perhaps his flowers of speech had been in mockery of my false position. I was thankful that I had on a plain gingham frock. Madam must explain why I was dressed like a lily of the field. Was that Mr. Erranti's reason for comparing me to a lily? Having always been accustomed to hearing praises of my beauty, I had failed to detect the sarcasm hidden in my employer's honeyed speech. I was, in truth, I said to myself severely, a very stupid girl—a very remarkably stupid girl; and, the sweet tones of the bronze gong floating out upon the air, I slowly returned to the house, dreading the necessity of meeting Mr. Erranti at breakfast.

Upon entering the hall I saw that Claude was, in imagination, sounding a pæan of victory. His sallow cheeks were slightly flushed, and he thumped the gong with a rapturous energy. When he saw me he stopped short, and gave vent to an excited giggle.

"Say, Miss Dean," he whispered, as he followed me into the dining-room, "I've settled it all for you. The housekeeper's room ain't a fit place for you,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

downstairs among the help, so I just up and told the Boss as much, and he said, 'Certingly; of course!' My"—with another wild giggle—"won't the girls be mad!" Then, seeing Mr. Erranti coming from the library, he became exceedingly dignified and stately, and relapsed into deferential silence.

Little was said at breakfast. Mr. Erranti was pre-occupied, and I rarely have anything to say. Less that morning than usual, because of my bitter thoughts. By and by Mr. Erranti, pushing away his sour, flabby roll with an air of disgust, caught my eye, and said:

"I like good bread, Miss Dean, but Norah can't make it. I must see if there is a good baker at Drone-ton, or import bread from town—I can't stand this stuff."

"Yet it's so easy to make," I said, and sighed.

"You think so, perhaps," smiling good-humoredly, as if tolerant of a child's nonsense; "but it may be more difficult than you imagine."

I looked at my employer gravely. It was many, many years since I had been treated as a child. There was a teasing light in the dark eyes. I, and my remark, amused him.

"I have never found it difficult," I said, quietly.

Mr. Erranti laughed. He thought I was talking for effect.

"I wish you'd give Norah a few hints on the subject, then. You might teach her how!"

He spoke in jest, but I seized my opportunity.

"I have your permission to try?"

"Indeed you have, my child!" was the laughing answer, as he rose and left the room.

I looked at Claude. Would he be my witness downstairs, if my right to enter there were questioned?

"You bet I'll stand by you," he said, understand-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ingly. "Land o' Goshen, Miss Dean, but you're in for it!"

I quite agreed with him. Asking to be told when breakfast belowstairs was over, I went out on the veranda to await the awful interview. Some time passed before Claude—his sallow face white with suppressed excitement—reappeared, and solemnly beckoned me to follow him. As he crossed the hall with mincing step it came to my mind that I had heard he was "keeping company" with Norah. Dolan had imparted this information to Anthony Cray, who had told Julie, who had told Madam, who had passed the intelligence on to me. I had hardly time to realize that this might complicate matters before I was in the head-quarters of the enemy.

Norah was a handsome creature, stout, rosy, blue-eyed. Pretty brown hair curled thickly about her broad, white forehead. Her cotton frocks, spotlessly clean, fitted neatly, and instead of a collar she wore a chain of thin gold, twisted many times around her throat. She was thirty, seven years older than Claude, a point on which she was said to be sensitive. She was a picture, standing, arms folded, in the centre of her great kitchen, awaiting my coming that warm June morning, with fierce defiance in her blue eyes.

"Miss Dean, this is Norah," said the excited Claude, solemnly performing the ceremony of introduction. "Norah, here's Miss Dean come to see you."

"Oh, indeed!" ejaculated Norah, tossing her head angrily.

She neither offered me a chair nor vouchsafed any answer to my civil words of greeting.

Two maids were in the kitchen, one embarrassed, the other, Ellen, a housemaid, eagerly expectant of battle. While I stood silent, wondering how I might

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

rid myself of these women and speak to the cook alone, Claude, nettled by his lady-love's rudeness, took her to task.

"For the land's sake, Norah," he exclaimed, "ain't you never goin' to ask Miss Dean to be seated? If you won't, then I will," angrily seizing a chair and placing it behind me with a thump. "One would think, to see you, you'd never been learnt manners!"

"I don't need you to teach me, anyways, Claude Raffarty," cried the indignant Norah, her eyes flashing. "I'll thank you to walk out of my kitchen and mind your own business! Manners indeed! Where's yours, I'd like to know!"

"I'm ashamed of you, Norah Milligan!" was the sharp retort. "I should think you was old enough to know better!"

This shot told. Face flushed and arms a-kimbo, Norah turned upon her "young man."

"I mayn't be so young as some folks"—with withering scorn—"but, thank God, I've got me own teeth in me head yet, anyways!"

This sally won applause from Ellen, Claude's showy set not being his own. I felt the time had come for me to bring the unpleasant scene to a close. Holding up my hand to impose silence, I bade Claude return to his duties in the pantry; then, turning swiftly upon the housemaid, I reminded her of her neglected work.

"Mr. Erranti is at home," I said, severely; "neglect will no longer pass unnoticed," and when she, with Claude, had left the kitchen, I told the cook plainly of his comments upon her bread. "How shall you like your master's going to a baker for bread? Yet he must, when you send up rolls that are both sour and flabby. A strange combination, Norah."

"P'raps you's thinkin' you could make better!" she cried, ironically, with a shrill, angry laugh.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I can, Norah."

"An' it's meself as would like to see you do that same!" screamed poor Norah, the brogue of her childhood shaken uppermost in her wrath.

"Then you shall," I said, taking prompt advantage of her words. "I will make my own yeast, and be ready to set the sponge to-night. I expect fair play from you, Norah. You will do nothing to spoil my work, I am sure."

Nor did she. Sullen, angry, disdainful, she kept carefully in the background, and though she would not help, did nothing to hinder me. I have always been lucky about my cooking, and my luck did not fail me at Highgrove Hall. I was successful in my breadmaking, pleasing both Madam and Mr. Erranti, and that part of the cooking fell, henceforth, to my share. I was, after this incident, allowed to assume my duties as housekeeper, and time no longer hung heavy on my hands.

A week before the Fourth of July the number of servants was greatly increased. Guests were expected. We were to have a house full, over the Fourth. I had seen little of Mr. Erranti, save at breakfast and dinner each day, since his return. He went to town every day, sometimes by train, and sometimes in his yacht, the Charlotte, named for his mother. He was invariably kind, but absorbed in his own affairs. A few days before the house-party I was summoned to the library, to consult about the preparations necessary. The bedroom question was the difficulty. There were only three, each with a dressing-room, in the second story, and but six on the third. One of these, I reminded Mr. Erranti, I was occupying, when he counted them all as vacant."

"I'm afraid you've been lonely," he said, "shut away up there by yourself. I'm sorry I didn't know

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

of it before. One of the maids might have slept near you. Are you timid?"

I smiled. "No, Mr. Erranti, I am accustomed to being alone."

"The men who are coming are a noisy lot," he said, musingly; "I wish you were somewhere else. What do you say to moving down into the second story, Miss Dean? Into the northeast room—the Blue Room? It seems to me that would be an excellent plan."

The idea was kind, but ridiculous. I had no intention of occupying the finest room in the house. When I refused, Mr. Erranti asked permission to see my room, and at once ran upstairs to examine it. Returning, he surprised me still more by saying he should order a new bolt put on the door. I looked for an explanation, but none was given. The next morning, running in for my work-basket, I found Claude, his mouth full of screws, busy putting on the bolt. His countenance expressed deep gloom, and when I said cheerfully that I hoped bolts and bars did not mean burglars, he only sighed heavily, vouchsafing no reply.

"Why, Claude," I cried, in astonishment, when I had really looked at his work, "you are putting on two! Why that chain-bolt? You may be sure I sha'n't wish to hold parley with midnight marauders!"

Removing the last screw from his ample mouth, Claude surveyed me severely for a moment, and then said:

"I should hope—not, Miss Dean,"—when, resuming his former stooping position, he screwed away with great energy.

I stood and watched him in silence. I had nothing more to say. Suddenly he remarked, gloomily:

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I guess you ain't seen much of Noo York brokers or Westerners come East on a toot, Miss Dean!"

I acknowledged my ignorance.

"Well, fresh ain't no name for 'em! Their goin'-s-on is what I call disgustin'," curling up his long nose, "and, if I had my way, they'd never get invited here. Bolts!" he exclaimed suddenly, with violence. "Yes, indeed, and a good thing, too! When the Boss mentioned your needin' one—seein' there was nothin' but this lame old lock on your door—I just procured two, and I hope, Miss Dean, you'll so far favor me as not to forget to use 'em. And—if you'll pardon my taking the liberty, Miss Dean—I'd suggest your takin' a back seat while them rampagin' ruffians is visiting these diggin's. By which I mean the back staircase as much as possible—avoidin' the hall and front."

So saying, and nodding gloomily, he picked up his basket of tools and departed, whistling a mournful air.

XII

At six, on the afternoon before the Fourth, our guests arrived. They came from town on the Charlotte, and we watched them, Madam, Julie, and I, from Madam's glass door as they crossed the lawn, to the house from the river. Madam was greatly excited, and had been so all day, demanding more attention than usual, although she knew I was very busy, superintending the new servants, and arranging sleeping-quarters for the coming party. The drawing-room had to serve as a bedroom, for the nonce. Three cots had been put up there, and the large bedrooms were to be crowded. Mr. Erranti had assured me that the men would consider every discomfort in the light of a frolic. Later, rooms were to be fitted up in the gardener's house, for any overflow. Claude grumbled to me in confidence that he should "Just dump 'em in the sty, the whole kit and boodle of 'em, Miss Dean, the fitting place for pigs, ain't it?"

The men, fifteen in all, accompanied by their handsome host, came, laughing and talking uproariously, toward the house, a fashionably clad, red-faced, noisy crowd. The afternoon was hot, and, judging from appearances, cooling drinks had been freely resorted to by these very jolly gentlemen.

"Pull in the blind-door, Julie! *Vite, ma fille!* They advance rapidly, and I would not be seen," said Madam, shrinking back as her son's guests drew near.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Julie obeyed, and we peeped through the slats unobserved. As they crossed the veranda and entered the hall I noticed that in one way they resembled each other closely. They were all sporting men. This was a look I knew well, having learned it in my childhood.

"*Ma foi*, but they are handsome—*ces messieurs!*" exclaimed Julie, watching them eagerly, eyes shining, cheeks aflame.

As she spoke, three whom I thought especially disagreeable looking were directly in front of our door: a large man, resembling a buffalo, with his chunky shoulders and heavy beard; one middle-sized, whose vacuous, white face was pitted and scarred; and a short, young fellow, whose retroussé nose, mop of black curls, and fiercely waxed moustaches, gave him an odd likeness to a French poodle. These three excited Julie's particular admiration.

"They handsome!" cried Madam, "they handsome! Look, then, at Philip, thy master! A god among satyrs! A crowd of dissipated, chattering chimpanzees! Take me away, Julie—look not upon them, Athena! I detest them—noisy buffoons—wicked men—pah!"

Dinner was over. I had had mine in my room. On my way downstairs I heard the men noisily leaving the dining-room and entering the hall. I drew back, not wishing to be seen on the grand staircase, and was turning to retrace my steps when curiosity impelled me to peep through the banisters at the scene below. The stately beauty of the hall, with its richly colored furnishings, made a fitting background for the master of the house. As he stood, surrounded by his guests, in the soft light shed by the myriads of lamps and candles, he might have been an Eastern prince receiving the homage of

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

some Western embassy. He was magnificently handsome. Beside him most of the men looked coarse, ill-shaped, or washed-out.

"A song, Erranti, a song!" cried the man who was like a poodle.

"Yes, yes," was heard on every hand; "give us a song to cheer!"

"Sing, sweet bird!" called one.

"Of 'Love' only, sing!" quoted another; "and here's the boy to play your accompaniment," and the speaker, laying his hands on the shoulders of a blond young man, playfully pushed him toward the piano.

It was Randal St. John. He was flushed, and looked less weary of life than usual. Philip joined him at the piano, they consulted together, and Randal began the simple, rhythmic prelude of Schubert's Serenade. It was time for me to go to Madam, but Philip began to sing—and I remained.

*"Leise flehen meine Lieder
Durch die Nacht zu dir,
In den stillen Hain hernieder,
Liebchen, komm zu mir."*

The exquisite words floated up to me borne on a melody more exquisite still. I forgot Madam, forgot my duty, forgot everything—save the perfect voice which filled the night with its passionate sweetness. I closed my eyes, and, leaning my head against the banisters, gave myself up to the rapturous ecstasy of the moment.

The music ceased. The audience, applauding loudly, demanded another song.

"Give us something English this time, will you?" shouted the Buffalo; "I can't catch on to Dutch!"

"Plain American's good enough for us all, I guess," said another.

Philip good-humoredly sang what they chose, and I was amazed at their choosing, for they asked for

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"The Bridge," "A Warrior Bold," and many Scotch and English ballads. The faster the man the simpler his taste in songs, Philip said afterward. When the music ceased Claude, with his white-aproned assistants, brought many little tables into the hall, placing chairs around them and cards upon them.

"Come, Randal," cried the Poodle, "come, take a hand with me, and we'll whip the lot of them!" He wore eye-glasses, and spoke with a slight German accent.

"No, no," said Randal; "can't possibly. I've sworn off."

This elicited a burst of laughter, and everyone remonstrated with him at once. Randal listened, smiled, and said nothing, but as I rose to go I saw that he had yielded to temptation, and had seated himself at the table with the curly headed man. It was three in the morning before these merry-makers sought repose. I heard them skylarking in the hall outside my heavily barred door, and it seemed to me but a few moments later that I was roused again from sleep by someone knocking. Glancing at my clock I saw that it was five, and, throwing on a wrapper, I opened my door, to find Claude, worried and nervous, waiting.

"For the Land's sake, Miss Dean," he whispered, hoarsely, "do dress as quick as you can and come down. Norah's awful sick and Ellen's a born fool—can't do nothin' for her, and who's to get breakfast the Lord only knows!" and he wrung his hands.

"I will, Claude," I said, and he went away comforted.

Poor Norah was in bed, with Ellen beside her, relating awful tales of sudden death. I thought her suffering from a severe bilious attack, and this, she assured me, was the case, begging me not to send for a doctor.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"It's only one of me bad sick-headaches, Miss," she said, faintly; "an' it's not the pain but thinkin' of me work that's killing me! Sure, I can't stand on me feet when I'm took like this, and how all them meals is to be cooked this day it's God Almighty that maybe knows, but not poor Norah Miligan," and she began to cry.

Assuring her that I would take her place, I thought to comfort her, but professional jealousy made the moment bitter.

"Sure, the maynoo cards is all wrote out," suggested Ellen, wearying of the rôle of sick-nurse; "Miss Dean can follow them."

So it was settled in the kitchen, but with Madam I had difficulty. I could not play cook and companion both, the duties of the former being no sinecure. Breakfast dragged on till twelve o'clock, when it was time to prepare for half-past one luncheon! With Julie's help I finally persuaded Madam to dispense with my services, and to promise to keep Norah's illness a secret from her son. This last pleased the strange fancy of the whimsical old lady.

Claude did much to help me, telling me what was expected.

"Coffee at seven sharp for the Boss, and he'll want his breakfast at eight, Miss Dean."

I expressed the surprise I had long felt, and said I wondered how Mr. Erranti could stand rising so early, when he went to bed so late.

"That's his way, Miss Dean! He never seems to need his sleep like other folks. I only wish I was the same," yawning prodigiously, and covering his large mouth with delicately uplifted fingers. An hour later he burst into the kitchen, giggling delightedly. "Boss says coffee's A1 this morning! Says he's glad Norah's woke up at last, and as she ain't done well lately! Oh, my, I thought I should

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ha' bust! Norah'll be mad enough to bite!" and he tittered wildly.

To make a diversion I asked what was in the wine-glasses he was carrying on his try.

"Cocktails, Miss Dean! And you wouldn't catch me astonishin' my insides with any such stuff in the mornings—nor at night, neither! But the gents upstairs thinks different. It'll be sody-water and cocktails from now on till one or two o'clock, maybe," and he stalked away, his whole person expressing the liveliest sensations of disgust and scorn.

Breakfast and luncheon were over, and Norah was feeling better, though still unable to cook the eight o'clock dinner, or late supper at twelve. I was to devote the afternoon to Madam, but after luncheon was out of the way I found I should have an hour to myself before she expected me. Still in kitchen trim—gingham frock, linen apron, sleeves rolled up, and braids snugly bound about my head—I betook myself to the garden to rest. The kitchen had been uncomfortably hot on that blazing July day. All the morning our guests had been setting off giant fire-crackers, the early risers striving to destroy the peace of the sluggards. It was pleasant to have them engaged at luncheon, and the place quiet for a time.

I was a little tired. The responsibility had weighed rather heavily upon me; I had worked hard. Under the shade of a mass of evergreens—pungent-scented arbor-vitæ—at the end of one of the garden paths, was a rustic sofa, and on this I lay down. Just outside this green bower splendid carnations exhaled their spicy odors, luring a host of drowsily humming bees to sip their honey. The warmth, the sweet scents, and the bees' slumber-song lulled me to sleep. From this nap I was roused

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

by the smell of tobacco and the sound of feet crunching on the gravel near by.

"Some of the gardeners," I thought, lazily; "they will not come in here," and lay still, loath to be disturbed. The footsteps stopped directly in front of the arbor. I kept my eyes shut. "It is Dolan," I said to myself. "If I pretend to be asleep he will go away," and I did not move.

"Jove, what a picture!" said a coarse voice. "Now's your chance, Sturgis! Go in and win a pair of gloves!"

"You bet I will," came the drawling answer.

Opening my eyes at last, I saw, within a few inches of my own, the vacuous, pock-marked face of the man I had seen the day before. With him were his boon companions, the three blocking up the entrance to my retreat. The Buffalo and the one with the black curls were egging on their friend, making bets as to his ultimate success. When I opened my eyes Sturgis drew back, daunted by my unexpected wakefulness. He was a pale, faded-out blond, looking both weak and vicious.

"Go it, Sturgis!" shouted the big man, with a fat laugh. "What, you ain't afraid of a pretty girl, I hope!"

"If—at—first—you—don't—succeed,
Try—try—again,"

jeered the Poodle.

Sturgis, sniggering feebly, stood still. I rose slowly to my feet, looking straight at him. He avoided meeting my eyes, tittered again, and backed in between his two friends.

"Well, well," remonstrated the Buffalo, "I'd no idea you had so little go in you, Sturgis! Better stand aside and make room for a better man," stepping forward.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"No, no; she's goin' to pay toll to me," cried Sturgis, recovering himself. "You like me best, my beauty, don't you!" extending both arms to prevent my passing.

I did not speak. Of what use to appeal to such half-tipsy creatures! Instead, I examined Sturgis swiftly, saw he was not properly balanced on his feet—few people are—stepped quickly forward, and struck him heavily on the side of his head with my open palm. He fell with some force into the arms of his stout companion, who sat down at once in the bed of carnations behind him. The curly headed man burst into frantic laughter as his friends rolled among the flowers. I hurried homeward, my heart sick with disgust.

Was this what I must look forward to, I asked myself, as I swept through the garden, cold with anger. To be insulted by every stranger who chanced to turn his insolent eyes upon my much-praised face? At this moment I saw Mr. Erranti strolling toward me, on his way to join his friends. Classing him with his associates, I felt I hated him, and would have passed without a word, but he stopped me. A look of pleasure at first lighted up his handsome face, but this changed to one of alarm.

"Athena!" he cried, "what is it? What has happened? Your face frightens me, it is so set—so white. I insist upon knowing—speak!" and he grasped my arm.

I stood quite still, looking him full in the eyes. It was difficult for me to articulate.

"Nothing has happened," I said at last, in low, even tones; "kindly remove your hand, and let me go," but he held me fast. "If you must know, Mr. Erranti"—laughing coldly—"I have been learning a lesson—as to incidents likely to occur in the life of an upper-servant."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"You speak in riddles," he said, slowly, paling under his tan; "pray what are the lives of upper-servants to you, Athena?"

"I am one"—icily—"and learning how to meet the exigencies of my position. How, you would ask? Plainly, then—with a box on the ear!"

He stood close to me, searching my face with his clever dark eyes, but there now leapt into them so tigerish an expression I drew back involuntarily.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, under his breath, "I understand. It will not occur again," and releasing me, he went on into the garden.

Fortunately Madam slept late that afternoon, and I had time to slip upstairs and think awhile, as well as to dress, before I joined her.

That was a typical Fourth of July on the Hudson!—very hot until six, then with gathering clouds gradually obscuring the sky, as under a heavy pall, and by nine o'clock rain descending in floods, putting out all fireworks save those of heaven's providing.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Julie, as the time for cooking the dinner drew near, "what a day have I passed! Alone all the morning with Madame, and now, behold, a storm approaches, and what to do I know not! I fear the lightning! I fear Monsieur, who commands me to soothe Madame! Ah, *juste ciel, quelle journée!*" and the usually impassive Frenchwoman wrung her hands. "Hush!" she exclaimed suddenly, staring out of the window. "Behold Monsieur! He walks with Monsieur Sturgis! What does he say?"

It had grown so quiet every sound was distinctly heard. As Mr. Erranti with his friend approached the house from the avenue we heard him say in sweet, silky tones:

"You'll give me my revenge to-night, Sturgis?"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Certainly, Erranti, if you wish it," replied Mr. Sturgis, but he laughed uncomfortably.

Julie's eyes gleamed as she said, "Monsieur Sturgis will do well to beware." Her smile was unpleasant, but I had no time to wonder at it or her words. Madam had detained me so long that I was forced to return to the kitchen in my delicate muslin, which worried me. The maids pinned my flowing sleeves behind my shoulders, and, tucking up my train, I enveloped myself in a huge apron and went to work. When, at half-past nine, I hurried back to Madam, I found her in bed, shivering with terror at the noises of the storm, the wailing of the wind through the trees, and the rumbling of still distant thunder.

"God be praised!" cried Julie; "you are come at last, Mademoiselle! Hear, then, the thunder which approaches! Ah, Mademoiselle, remain with Madam, I beg, I implore!"

"Athena!" cried Madam from the bed, "come close to me. Don't leave me to the care of that woman, *ma bien-aimée*! She fears the devil, her master, who comes for her in the storm!" Taking my hands she drew me down beside her. "Lay thy sweet face by mine, *chérie*"—stroking my cheek with her poor swollen hand—"and leave me not. I love thee, dear child, and fear nothing when thou art near, for thou art one of God's angels." Then, with swift change of tone, cowering with sudden terror in my arms, "Ah, the thunder! Hold me fast, Athena, I am afraid!"

At that moment Mr. Erranti entered, calm, smiling, and handsome. As his eyes encountered mine there came into their lustrous depths an expression I failed to understand. Madam, making a great effort, sat up in bed, greeting him with a tremulous smile. She clung to my hands, keeping me beside her.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Philip," entreatingly, her voice trembling, "Philip, I want Athena to stay with me to-night."

"If she will be so kind," added her son, looking down upon me with the odd expression in his eyes.

"She has cooked for thee and those noisy men all day," said Madam, vehemently; "surely she might stay with me all night."

Julie and I exchanged glances. Was this how poor Norah's secret was kept!

"What?" questioned Philip, sternly, yet as if he could not believe his ears. "What are you saying, *ma mère*? Miss Dean cook for me? I don't understand."

"Thou art usually quick enough, Philip," whimpered Madam, observing my startled glance at Julie, "seeing all about thy house with those great eyes of thine! Yes, Athena, *chérie*, I now remember thou didst say I was not to tell; but I am old, and the old forget. Yes, old, old, old! A feeble old woman, *rien de plus*!"

She covered her face with her hands, but watched us all through her fingers.

"Is this true, Miss Dean?" Philip asked.

Much annoyed, I replied in the affirmative. "Norah is ill. I am housekeeper. *C'est mon métier*!"

"It shall not occur again," said Philip. I thought of our interview in the garden. "Cray can get supper, grill bones, devil lobsters—what you order. He cooks well, though not as you can, Miss Dean. I know now what I have to guard against in this—foe of mine own household! We can't have this lovely child killing herself in our service, *Maman*."

"No," said Madam, under her breath. She looked frightened, unhappy.

"Try to spare her, *Maman*, to control thyself for her sake. Try not to dim this sunshine that has

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

come to brighten our dull home. Promise me to be calm and kind." He stooped and kissed her cheek.

"Yes, Philip," Madam spoke meekly.

"You consent to remain here for to-night? I would rather know you to be here than upstairs," said Mr. Erranti, turning to me.

I disliked the tone the conversation had taken. After saying coldly that I should, of course, do as Madam wished, I asked him not to rebuke the servants for obeying my orders in keeping silent about the illness in the house.

"They must always obey your orders," was the suave answer. "I myself will be the first to set them an example."

There came a tap at the door, and Claude thrust his head in.

"Mr. Sturgis a-hollerin' his head off for you, sir. Hadn't you better come along?"

Mr Sturgis was not kept waiting.

XIII

Madam endured the noises of the storm quite bravely that night, even falling asleep while the thunder still growled. But I, who slept so well at all times, lay broad awake for many hours. Every time I almost drowsed I saw, close to my own, the face of Mr. Sturgis, and waked with a shudder of disgust. I could not forget the insult offered me. I felt degraded. I had always been treated with respect; how had I changed that strangers now dared deny it me? Mr. Erranti's manner displeased me. He called me by my first name as if he had the right to do so. His very expression when he looked at me I resented, although why it angered me I could not say; there was a certain freedom in his way of speaking to me—as to a petted child. In short, his manners grated on me, and, resolving to put him in his proper place, should it cost me my position, I finally fell asleep.

I waked early. Faint light was stealing through the slats of Madam's blinds. The dawn was near. A great disgust for my surroundings swept over me as I glanced about the gayly furnished room. I was sick of luxury. It choked me. I longed for fresh air and solitude. Still fully dressed, in my dinner toilet, I picked up an old white silk, swan's-down bordered, opera cloak—Madam's latest gift—from off the couch where it had been flung, and wrapping it around me slipped from the house.

The eastern sky was flushed with pink; in the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

heart of its rose-colored splendor trembled and sparkled the morning star. I stood still, awed by the beauty of the scene, and folding my hands, prayed for the true courage of a humble spirit. Cares and vexations suddenly became petty, in the peace of this new day. I banished all angry thoughts—unworthy now—and was at rest.

The birds in the garden chirruped and sang on every hand. The flowers beside the path, still limp from the evening's shower, gave forth a faint fragrance. I went to the spring under the birch trees to see the rosy dawn reflected in its limpid depths. . . .

On its surface there floated a dead thing—a man in evening dress.

He lay face downward, his head a little under water. Around the neck was twisted a leathern strap; below, at the bottom of the basin, a small dark object, the weight of iron on the other end of the horse-tether, which had been used to make death certain. A frightful water-weed, with root and ghastly flower!

For a moment everything reeled about me, then, dropping my clóak, I flung myself on the wet flagstones edging the basin, and, every nerve tense, strove to drag it out. All my strength and will were needed, for I was sick with the horror of it. At last, beside me, staring with sightless eyeballs up at the morning sky, lay the man who had offered me insult—Mr. Sturgis.

Some moments passed before I could force myself to place my hand on his heart. It had ceased to beat. The man was dead. Still, every means to revive him must be tried. I strove to rise, but could not. Then, to my great relief, I heard steps upon the gravel.

"The bird's plumage!" said a sweet, rich voice, Mr. Erranti's. "Where is the bird? The Swan of

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Highgrove Hall! Ah, little Athena—my God, child, what have we here?" Seizing me almost roughly, he drew me back to a rustic bench beneath the birches. "You found him? The damned coward, to do it here! There, sit still, till I make sure."

He went to examine in his turn, and, for a moment, giving way to my horror, I covered my face that I might not see. Steadied by the presence of Philip, I was soon able to offer the help he needed.

"You there, Athena! Don't look at him again, child. Yes, he's quite dead, no use trying to revive him. Don't take it hard—he was a vicious beast." He began to go through the dead man's pockets with marvellous rapidity. A handful of small silver, a few old letters, a bunch of keys—nothing more.

"Humph!" muttered Philip to himself, "worse than I thought. Damn the silly fool!" Then, very sharply, "Still here, Athena! Run away, child—or, no, stay a moment," and, drawing me again to the bench, he laid his hand on my shoulder and looked steadily into my eyes. He was weighing me in the balance. I shivered. "Cold? But of course you are." Seizing my cloak he wrapped it so tightly about me that I could not move. "Poor little woman! It's enough to make you ill—yet I must beg for your help. Will you help me, Athena?"

"Yes."

"Then listen—I wonder if I dare trust you"—sighing impatiently—"well, I suppose I must. That fool yonder, who might at least have shown some regard for decency in the manner of his death, has a wife and children. They must never know how he died—do you understand?"

"I think so," I murmured.

"Think so," echoed Philip; "surely you must know so, dear child! You wouldn't have a good

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

woman and innocent children bear the disgrace of that man's suicide, when it can be so easily prevented?" He spoke with great gentleness, pity for those injured in every intonation of his sweet voice. He was so handsome in his white morning suit, strong, clever, determined; a contrast, indeed, to the dead man by the spring.

"You will aid me in keeping this secret, Athena? *Maman* must not know. It would agitate her terribly—perhaps might kill her. Promise me you will keep silence."

I gave my word.

His manner changed. A load seemed lifted from his shoulders. Taking a note-book from his pocket he wrote rapidly, and tearing out the leaf folded and gave it me. This, with his bunch of keys, I was to give Cray.

"Cray is in the kitchen," he explained, "making coffee for the men who are leaving on the early train. You will have to take his place, to do his work—I am so sorry, Athena!"

Sorry! The very idea of nice, humdrum coffee-making was a happiness. Different indeed from the nightmare horror surrounding me. I turned to go without a word. I wanted to run, in my anxiety to escape. Philip stopped me.

"One moment," he spoke hurriedly. "You should know what will happen. At breakfast I shall express surprise that Sturgis is absent. Cray, hurrying in, will bring news that his body has been found in the river. Drowned while taking an early bath. Cramp, it will be supposed. The body shall remain in the boat-house. I won't have it brought near you and *Maman*. Now run, dear child! For the sake of that poor wife be swift and secret."

The sun had risen. Its bright rays shone through the branches of the forest trees which topped the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

eastern wall. Skirting the house, I ran down the steps of the basement area into the kitchen, where I found Cray noiselessly preparing breakfast. He received my news and his master's orders as coolly as if such events were of daily occurrence in his life. Telling me what remained to be done, he vanished, like the shadow he had grown to be. America did not agree with the man, if one might judge by his dispirited appearance;—a strange man, Anthony Cray, but an excellent confidential servant.

I was in the kitchen when Claude brought the news I expected. Bursting in, his face ashen, his eyes starting from their sockets, and wringing his long hands, he exclaimed:

"Oh, for the Land's sake, Miss Dean, such a awful tragedy as has taken place!"

He sank into the nearest chair, the excited servants crowding close about him.

"Oh, mercy me! It's too awful! There sat the Boss eatin' and drinkin' his coffee as usual when he up and says, 'By the way, where's Sturgis?' says he! Oh, my Land"—poor Claude covered his face with his hands—"it's too horrid and blood-curdling for anythin'!"

The eager crowd surrounding him urged him on, crying:

"For goodness' sake, Claude, don't stop!"

"'Where's Sturgis?' says the Boss, ca'm, never suspectin' nothing." Claude, uncovering his face, looked around with eyebrows raised, giving an exaggerated imitation of Mr. Erranti's composed manner. "'Where's Sturgis?' says he"—the servants held their breath—"and with that in comes Anthony Cray"—rising so suddenly that his audience shrank back—"in comes Anthony Cray, and I will say Tony done it well, so quiet and decent—'May I speak

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

with you, sir?" says he, lookin' at the Boss. "Yes, yes; what is it?" says the Boss, kinder impatient, but you know his way"—the servants nodded violently—" 'I'd better see you alone, sir, I think,' says Cray, still very ca'm and respectful, you know his way"—a chorus of nods with cries of "*Do go on!*"

"Cray glances around the table at the other guests, kinder doubtful. 'Speak out, man!' says the Boss; 'is the house on fire?' 'Worse than that, sir,' says Cray; 'I wish 'twas only fire, but I'm afraid it's death!' 'My God!' says the Boss under his breath, in a kind of awful whisper, '*Mamong!*'—you know what he calls Madam. 'No, no, sir,' says Cray, mighty quick, 'it's Mr. Sturgis, sir; early swim, sir; cramp, sir. I think he's dead, sir,' and with that everybody round the festal board looked kinder queer and green, and we all trailed down to the dock as fast— Sure enough, 'twas him—dead—drown-dead! I wish I hadn't seen—it, I do," and again poor Claude hid his face with his long hands. "I have doubts if I ever forgit that sight! When they begun to examine the—the—corpse, I just lit out for home as fast as get out. Somehow I feel mighty sickish and—and—queer!"

A cup of strong black coffee, piping hot, that I hastened to give the poor fellow, revived his courage. The servants huddled together like frightened sheep. I was obliged to speak sharply to them, reminding them of their duties and telling them that Madam must not learn of the accident.

"Such a shock might kill her," I said. "You must control yourselves."

"Sure, it's Miss Dean as is right," said Norah, who had become my friend and ally. "If the Madam hears a whisper 'twon't be my fault. Them as has long tongues in their heads had best be care-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ful"—glancing significantly at a talkative housemaid.

"If Madam should learn of this most unpleasant circumstance," drawled Claude, "I shall make it my business to find out who done the deed. And—I shall feel it my bounden, if painful dooty, to inform the Boss of what I know!" He stared severely around him, and left the kitchen with dignified tread.

But they all behaved well, poor things, and Madam was kept in ignorance. As Mr. Erranti had promised, everything was done at the boat-house. The necessary unpleasant formalities were gone through with there, and the Charlotte served to transport people to and from Droneton.

At noon that day I was again in the garden, under the birches by the pool. As I embroidered tall lilies on the dull, green silk of Madam's new curtain, I forced myself to glance now and then into the depths of the spring. Its clear waters bubbled up as fresh and limpid as if they had never borne the burden of that awful weed. Goldfish darted gayly hither and thither in its sun-illumined depths. In the branches rustling above me birds twittered in subdued, mid-day fashion. It was all so peaceful, while in the boat-house——

"Athena," said Madam, breaking in upon my disagreeable thoughts, "Athena, thou art very pale to-day! Yes, yes; I know I need not to be told that thou art always pale—to-day it is different; but yes, of a difference to be seen. Thou hast wearied thyself in that hot kitchen. Obey Philip, and do no more cooking. Except for the bread," she added, mindful of her own comfort, "that does thee no harm. A womanly occupation, the making of bread, *n'est-ce pas?* Thy arms and hands are very strong, yet they do not look so. They are beautiful, Athena; but that is not for you to remember, my

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

child. 'Handsome is as handsome does'—have I said that right? 'It's better to be good than pretty,' 'All that glitters is not'—no, that's not it; 'Beauty is only skin deep!' They are untrue, these sayings; I don't believe them! I am pretty, and good also. Thou art beautiful—and as the angels!—though dull. (Dost suppose the angels are dull, *ma belle*? But they can play. I like the harp, but not too many harps—played all at once, as in Heaven.) Julie is handsome and she is—but no, Julie is bad. A devil. My mother used to say"—she stopped short, confused—"No, no,"—in a whisper—"I must not think of her! When I was young, Athena, the people used to say—for I was born and bred up in—no! no! no!!"—a look of terror in her bright eyes—"never mind where I was born, I did not say, did I, *très chère*? But no, of course not. I am old. I forget of what I talk. Look at the little lake, Athena! How lovely, with the sunbeams sparkling on the water! It is the Heart of the garden, *n'est-ce pas, ma bien-aimée*? A pure heart, like thine, with no black secret to hide! No horrid dead secret, to shoot, and bury, and—" Her voice rose high and shrill. I leaned forward and caught both her hands.

"My lilies, dear Madam! Don't they please you, that you refuse to watch them grow?" I laid my cheek against hers.

"I am ashamed!" she cried, gayly, forgetting her strange fancies. "In looking at the garden flowers I did forget thy silken lilies for a moment! Let me see them now."

By evening Highgrove Hall was empty save for its master, its mistress, and the servants. The visitors had left. Claude was wandering about the upper hall when I went to dinner.

"Say, Miss Dean," he began, in a mysterious whis-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

per, "just hold on a minute, will you? I want to tell you something."

"About the house, Claude?"

"Lord, no; we ain't thinkin' about houses and as how they're kep these days—my Landy, no! It's about the Boss. What do you suppose them gentlemen friends of his had the cheek to say this morning, when they heard of that poor creature's tragical demise?"

"What, pray?"

"Said as he done it himself, 'cause the Boss had cleaned him out last night! Case of sue-side, they said!"—and Claude snorted with scorn.

I was silent, not knowing what to say.

"Had the cheek to say the Boss had roped in his little all! Said he tempted him to play when the corpse had swore off to please his wife! Said the Boss meant mischief last night—that the corpæ didn't want to play. Tornted him into it—askin' for his revenge; and so on, an' so forth!"

"How dreadful!" I exclaimed, horrified by Claude's story.

"Yes, sir-ree! But they had to take it all back. Had to eat humble pie, chunks of it"—and Claude giggled nervously—"and it's the pie as gives me dispepsy worst of all!" Then, severely and mournfully, "I should think they'd be ashamed; but Lord, them fellers don't know the first meaning of the word. Well, to perceed—when that corpse's pockets come to be investigated, over five hundred was found in them!"

"Five hundred—dollars, Claude?" I was aghast.

"Yes, ma'am, five—hundred—dollars! And some change; but that ain't worth mentioning, of course. So you see he wasn't to say busted clean through! And them men sung small, I can tell you! I thought you'd be interested to hear, Miss Dean, for you do

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

love fair play. A baby could see that. And the Boss he tore up the I. O. U.'s he had from the dead, and behaved honorable all round. He's a kind man, Mr. Erranti—a very kind man. Has his faults, like the rest of us—I know I got plenty, but I ain't seen yours yet, Miss Dean. Yes, he's a kind man. Good to his aged mother, and generous to all. There's nothin' mean about him, I guess."

"Claude."

"Yes, Miss Dean."

"Is Mrs. Sturgis poor, do you know?"

"Lord, no, Miss Dean! An only child, they say, and her parents just rollin' in their wealth!"

"I'm very glad," I said, thoughtfully.

"So'm I," said Claude; "and I'm mighty glad, too, that he had a pocketful of money—him, the corpse, I mean. If he hadn't—well, things would have maybe looked ugly for the Boss. He is fond of playing for money, and he does most generally win! But that ain't his fault—he's smarter than most, that's all. But it's time I gonged for dinner," and Claude ran lightly downstairs.

Mr. Erranti had something taken to the library for him, and sent polite messages begging me to excuse his absence. He was very busy, Claude said. But when I left Madam's room that night I found him waiting for me in the hall. And I was not glad to see him.

"Dear child," he said, very gently, taking my hand as he spoke, "do you think you can sleep after the sad adventure of this morning, or shall I mix you a sleeping-draught?"

I tried to draw my hand away, but pretending not to notice my effort he only held it the closer. Not choosing to have a scene at the foot of the great staircase I let him have his way, but declined the sleeping-draught.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Strong little hand," he said, looking deep into my eyes, "strong little hand! Swift to succor those in peril, swift to avenge an insult!"—and lifting it to his lips kissed it before releasing me. "Are you sorry, now, that you struck him, Athena?"

"No."

Philip laughed. And I did not like his laugh. It was fatuous with proprietary pride.

"Good-night," I said, coldly, and bowing slightly turned to the staircase.

"One moment, Athena! Let me tell you that our plan worked smoothly. Thanks to your sweet helpfulness Mrs. Sturgis will never know the truth."

"I am glad she is not poor, Mr. Erranti. Good-night."

"No, not poor, Athena. Don't go just yet. How did you discover that?"

"Claude told me."

"Indeed!" Mr. Erranti frowned slightly. "Did he tell you of the money I stupidly overlooked?"

"Yes. I did not know people ever carried so much about with them."

"They do when they want to play on the sly"—he smiled grimly. "Cheques and I. O. U.'s are tell-tales—not so, dollar-bills!"

I stood still, thinking, then said, slowly, "Weak people who do what he did usually leave letters saying why they did it, don't they?"

"Usually."

"It is fortunate he did not."

"Very fortunate."

I looked earnestly at Philip. His eyes were bent upon the rug at our feet, his face expressionless, yet I knew as certainly as if he had told me that there had been letters—and that these letters had been destroyed.

I turned and ascended the staircase, forcing my-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

self to walk slowly. I wished to run. I forced myself to bow an acknowledgment to his "Sleep well, sweet child!" but I drew a long sigh of relief when I reached my room, and shot the many bolts of its door into place.

It had been a trying day, and this interview with Philip was the last straw. My mind was tired out. I sat down by my open window to rest, hoping the cool night air might enable me to regain my accustomed serenity before I tried to sleep. I wished to forget, for the time, the events of the day, to cease thinking of its horrors—and of Mr. Erranti. But this last seemed impossible. In spite of reminding myself that I was at Highgrove Hall to earn my living, and not for the purpose of enjoying the society of its owners; in spite of telling myself that because Mr. Erranti's manners offended me, there was no need for me to go over and over what he had said, how he had looked and acted; still I sat by my window and thought of him. I wondered about his father—an Italian adventurer, probably. Madam was a gentlewoman, but her son was not quite a gentleman. He had odd ways—Italian ways?—loved to bask in the sun, bareheaded. Would his complexion be white, or olive, were it free from tan? He was tanned so evenly, a clear, pale brown, on face, throat, and hands. I thought of his sporting tastes, his passion for gambling;—then, my mind reverting suddenly to what I had found in the pool, I hurried to my prayers, and to bed.

XIV

"I wish a kindly Providence had seen fit to endow me with a humdrum, jog-trot nature—like Dick Thorpe's, for instance, instead of giving me the sensitive organization I now possess."

Randal St. John was the speaker. He lounged comfortably in his favorite place, on the edge of the veranda at my feet, and, as usual, was smoking a cigarette.

"Mine is a complex nature," he continued, "and, I must say, I find it hard to get on with."

I remained silent.

"You are thinking that other people find me hard to get on with, Miss Dean. You never do me justice!"

"Perhaps not," I acquiesced, composedly.

"I wish"—he spoke with sudden energy—"I were like Dick. He always knows what he wants, and goes for it, saving your presence, tooth and nail! Now I"—becoming reflective—"know what I want in the big, but I'm continually led off in pursuit of the little. I'm like a lovely butterfly, Miss Dean, who sees in the distance an enormous rose, filled to the brim with honey. The charming creature—I allude to the insect, of course!—goes for the rose as fast as it can skip; but right and left it sees smaller, but equally fetching flowers, which lure it from the straight and narrow path along which it is clambering. That butterfly is your devoted admirer here present, and he's what I call in a hole! What do you say?"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I had nothing to say, for my mind was troubled by my own concerns. Randal's never interested me. Several days had passed since the death of Mr. Sturgis. Everything was peaceful and serene at the Hall, which was well, as Madam's birthday was to be celebrated on the morrow. What troubled me that lovely Friday morning was that I had nothing to offer Madam as birthday gift. The fête day, Saturday, was that on which my salary fell due. My first month at Highgrove Hall was over.

I had no money in my purse with which to purchase a trifle for my kind mistress. I could not demand my pay at peep of dawn, and run to Droneton to buy one! Randal complained of being "in a hole!" I was in a dilemma! I sighed. Randal thought I paid tribute to his sad reflections.

"It's a comfort to know I've got your sympathy, at any rate," he said, echoing my sigh. "It's so rare I appreciate it doubly when you do honor me with a little. I'm awfully fond of you, Miss Dean."

Randal talked nonsense constantly.

"Yes," stretching his legs out still more comfortably, "I'm much to be pitied. My nature demands variety in life, and I'm doomed to be a clergyman, to grow insipid and solemn. Don't say what you wish to, please, for there isn't a particle of the 'Onward, Christian Soldier' in my make-up. I know you're awfully religious, though you don't talk about it. I dare say I shock you. Quite right—it suits your style. Not mine, by a long shot. My nature demands variety. I like the mazy dance, a game of cards, the theatre, the race-course, etc. And I like quiet chats with a serene-eyed goddess!"

This last meant he liked the freedom of Highgrove—and its veranda. It was very pleasant. The glimpses of the river, with its distant background of blue hills, were charming. Between the pillars that

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

supported the veranda roof, trellises of wrought iron, the width of a ladder, were massed with vines, turning the veranda into a bower of green.

"When I become a serious divine"—Randal loved to discourse about himself—"I may never again enjoy a good ballet! As for holding converse with the gentle denizens of the green-room—no, no, a descent into hell! As for playing cards for money—gambling is such a nasty word—angels and ministers of grace defend us! Not that I do play any more—given it up, Miss Dean."

"How long since?" I asked, remembering he had joined the game I had watched begin in the hall a few nights since.

"Not for ages, Miss Dean. I swore a solemn swear to the old gentleman that I wouldn't, never-no-more! I wear this giddy ring"—indicating Nemesis—"as a reminder. Should I break my promise—a thing *I* couldn't do, Miss Dean"—looking earnestly at me with innocent, blue eyes—"I lose Nemesis. Looks severe enough to keep a fellow straight, doesn't she?"—making the jewel flash in the sunshine. "To tell the truth, I'm half afraid of her! The Goddess of Vengeance! I'll bet you were the image of her when you clipped poor Sturgis over the head, and sent him and Dodd flying into space! There, you needn't open your big eyes so wide—Von Schlange told me, curly haired chap—little black-poodle man. Said you couldn't have laid Sturgis out better if you'd been in training for a boxing match! Wish I'd seen it." He was silent a moment, then said, "You're a very strange girl, Miss Dean. I can't make you out."

"Is there any reason that you should?" I asked, not unnaturally; but he went on as though I had not spoken.

"You're so wise about some things and so—well.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

so simple about others. You like to work! To cook! To sew! Yet, about languages, you're a walking Tower of Babel! Come"—coaxingly—"tell me, Miss Dean—are you awfully deep, or only——"

"Only shallow," I said, finishing his sentence for him.

Randal smiled very broadly. Much of the inner lining of his upper lip came into view. A disagreeable curiosity was in his eyes. There came the noise of wheels on the veranda, and Madam appeared, pushed by Julie, whose face darkened at sight of us.

"*Eh bien, mes enfants!*" cried the old lady, as she approached. "But no, no French at present! This *Vaurien* does not understand!"

"When you swear at me in French, I do," said Randal, rising with languid grace and going to Madam's side. "What was the little cuss-word you used just now? Something very naughty-bad?"

Madam laughed, in high good humor. Her pretty brown eyes sparkled, her cheeks wore the pink of a half-faded rose. A handsome old lady was Madam, when well and gay—as on that summer morning long ago.

"To-morrow is my birthday, Randal"—she spoke with childish glee—"and all the world will do my bidding! I have asked much of Philip—and to all he said yes, yes, yes!" She clapped her hands.

"Of course," said Randal, "who wouldn't? I always obey you because I'm so awfully fond of you, dear Madam!" smiling sweetly as he spoke.

"Go away, Athena, for a moment. I would speak alone with Randal."

"You see," said Randal, as I turned to obey, "I have cut you out, Miss Dean!"

I walked to the end of the veranda. Something was coming up the avenue—a large furniture van.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I hurried back to Madam; the sound of wheels on the avenue always alarmed her. To my surprise she was still gay.

"What is coming, *ma belle*? A carriage with boxes or a truck with furniture?" She broke into a little mischievous laugh at the surprise in my face. "You, too, must promise, like Randal here, to do as I wish to-morrow. Will you, my Athena?"

"With all my heart, dear Madame," I said quickly, but rather sadly; "if only I had something besides my obedience to offer!"

She stretched out both hands to me, and, drawing me to her, kissed me fondly.

"Dear child," she murmured, "dear, lovely child! Thou hast already given me much! Thy sweet, ungrudging service, thy gentle companionship. I want nothing more. Only remain ever with me, Athena."

She spoke in French. Randal watched us curiously. Madam, releasing me, saw his expression.

"Philip says, Randal, that he feels as if Athena were some lovely young niece, or cousin, come to brighten our quiet home. He thinks we should do our best to make her happy and contented." Folding her hands in her lap she leaned back, with a childish air of importance.

"Erranti is quite right," murmured Randal, with eyes cast down. "Oh, very right indeed."

"Athena, go with Julie to my room, and remember, you have promised obedience! No, no, the other way"—I had turned toward the front of the house—"through the door which leads into my room past Julie's from the veranda. Randal"—smiling graciously—"will take charge of me; won't you, Randal?"

"Gladly," was the ready answer; but Mr. St. John looked seriously alarmed as he watched us depart.

In Madam's room a strange woman was opening

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

two large paper boxes and spreading their contents upon the bed.

"Here is Mademoiselle," announced Julie, as I entered; then, turning to me, "The person sent to try on the new evening gown, Mademoiselle."

I bowed, and asked an explanation. Julie crossly snapped out a few ill-humored words about Madame's "*jour de fête*," "*toilette extraordinaire!*" "*sortie du bal*," until I stopped her, none the wiser, but not caring to hear more.

"This is the dress ordered," said the woman, taking up a mass of exquisite white brocade and holding it for me to admire.

It was, indeed, very beautiful, splendid enough for a princess, far too magnificent for me. Through the fabric ran a wonderful pattern of lilies, each flower delicately outlined by a thread of silver that, catching the light, added to the shimmer of the stuff. The silk was so soft, a fold could be gathered and crushed into a ball without wrinkling, yet so rich it could stand alone. The gown was fashioned simply, as the material required. A fall of rich lace trimmed the low corsage and served as an apology for sleeves. Julie's ill-humor melted away as she dressed me. Fine clothes to her were rapture. "Ah, heaven!" she cried, in ecstasy, "but that is beautiful!"

I stood before one of Madam's long mirrors, and looked at myself earnestly. I had never worn a ball gown, and saw myself for the first time with arms and shoulders bare. I thought of my mother, and my eyes filled with a sudden rush of tears. Had she lived what might not this gay attire have meant to me—a happy home, my mother's tender pride—while now! I turned from the mirror, sick at heart. What to me was the costly finery worn to gratify the whim of a kind but strange old lady?

"Mademoiselle is not pleased?" broke in the anx-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ious voice of the dressmaker. "But the fit is perfect! Perhaps the brocade does not suit."

"Yes," said Julie, authoritatively, "the fit is perfect. I saw myself to the measurements sent. The material suits *Mademoiselle à merveille!*"

"Monsieur Erranti," went on the other Frenchwoman, "was indeed particular. The pattern must be of lilies, he would have no other. And no time given us—a few days only! To speak truth, we were allowed to set our own price—one must pay well to be served so quickly. I hope *Mademoiselle* is pleased——"

"A great success," I said, sorry for the woman's distress.

"One moment," she cried, beaming with satisfaction, "the evening wrap—behold it!" And she slipped over my shoulders a mantle of the same brocade, fringed with silver.

This, too, I praised, reflecting that if I was uncomfortable there was no reason others should be. The woman then measured me, saying she would hope for further orders. I did not tell her that this must never be, but went at once in search of *Madam*, who had, Julie said, mounted to the second story. Owing to her rheumatism *Madam* never went upstairs, and I wondered what could have taken her there. I found her seated on a divan in the upper hall, Randal lounging beside her. Scattered about the floor was a quantity of twine and paper, showing that unpacking had been going on. From behind the closed door of the Blue Room came the sound as of many people at work, and against the opposite wall was pushed the furniture of that room. *Madam* watched my evident surprise with pleasure, Randal with a curiosity he strove vainly to hide.

"*Eh bien, très chère,*" cried *Madam*; "you find

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

us busy, yes? We are making changes, great changes, in our new home—and all for you, *mignonne!* Sit down beside me”—patting the divan with her poor, swollen hand—“and Randal and I will tell you what is doing to please you. Yes, yes, I am an old woman, ’tis true, but I have my way once a year!” She laughed like a child. “See, then,” pointing to the door of the Blue Room, “that room has on one side the corridor leading to the third-story stairs, on the other Philip’s dressing-room, *n’est-ce pas?*”

“Yes, Madam.”

“Then the very room for you! Hush, do not interrupt me, it is well arranged. Philip moves into his dressing-room—a well-sized room, truly—giving up his own room to his guests. He will be on one side of you, the corridor on the other, the noisy men can have the third story to themselves, which is quite what should be.”

I remained silent, being ever slow of speech. “I have been anxious,” Madam went on, in low, confidential tones, “but have said nothing”—nodding her head and looking very wise—“till I could talk the matter over with Philip. We decided you were too young to be left alone in that out-of-the-way third story.”

“Dear me, yes,” murmured Randal, “much too young—and too handsome! Erranti will make a lovely chaperon——”

Madam stared at him, puzzled. “I am Miss Dean’s chaperon,” she said, severely; “she needs no other.”

“Dear me, no,” Randal made answer, “of course not!”

“You see, Athena,” said the old lady, giving up the effort to understand Mr. St. John, “if you should feel alarmed in the night you can tap three

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

times on the big mirror that shuts off your room from Philip's—you remember there was a door of communication, *chérie*? Shut now, forever, tight and fast, by a great mirror! But Philip would hear the tapping, and *vite!*—out into the hall he would run, his revolver ready! He shoots well, poor Philip. I saw him shoot the devil once——”

“Madam, dear Madam,” I cried, interrupting her, for I not only feared the effect of this sad fancy upon her nerves, but wished to guard her from Randal's cruel curiosity, “how thoughtful you are for me! Please—why is the Blue Room furniture out here?”

Her look of painful excitement vanished, Randal looked disappointed.

“Why, *ma chère*?” She spoke gleefully. “Because the room is being done over—to please me! Philip has chosen everything; but, since his taste is sometimes odd I have advised him. Your room will be perfect. I am here now, with young Randal, to view the effect.”

“Yes, oh, yes, to view the—effect!” echoed Randal, gazing with an air of profound abstraction at the tips of his highly polished shoes.

The door of the Blue Room was now cautiously opened on the merest crack, and a man's head thrust through the aperture. At sight of Madam the body followed, and the foreman stood before us. His manner of closing the door behind him, as if his small secret were a wild beast bent on escape, so tickled Randal that he laughed aloud. Owing to the intense interest of the moment his mirth passed unnoticed.

“We've done all we can, ma'am,” said the upholsterer to Madam, in a deferential whisper, “only the bric-à-brac remains to be set round. Mr. Erranti 'll see to that, I guess.”

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"No, no," cried Madam, imperiously, "finish the room yourself."

"We've done about all we can, ma'am,"—coughing gently behind his hand. "I should like to get back to N'York by an early train, if possible. We're driven with orders just now."

"That's nothing to me," said Madam, sharply. "I suppose you are paid to attend to this."

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I've no complaint to make, I'm sure. We had a real scramble to get the things, Mr. Erranti being so set on a certain pattern; but he gave us *carte blanche*"—then, looking at me—"Perhaps this is the young lady for whom the room's being altered? I hope, miss—ma'am——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Madam, "it's done to please me! My birthday gift!"

"Oh, indeed," stammered the foreman, confused by Madam's irate manner. "I understood it was for a young—that is—for a—a very young lady."

Madam stared disapprovingly, and began to think aloud.

"The man's a fool!" she grumbled. "A fool returns to his folly as a dog to—to what he's thrown up! He don't understand his business. I know the room is badly done—I'll look at it before he runs away. A sly rogue, I'll be bound!"

Affecting a gracious manner, Madam begged the unhappy foreman to accompany her on a tour of inspection, commanded Randal to lift her into her chair, and vanished, with her victim, into the Blue Room.

"Please follow her, Mr. St. John," I said, "she wished to have you with her. I am the only one who is not to see it to-day."

"I'd rather stay with you," was the plaintive answer.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I crossed to the long railing which edged the gulf between the two branches of the staircase, leaned on its broad top, and stared down into the cool hall below. I was disturbed, ill at ease. Why, I could not quite understand. My mind works slowly. Presently Randal joined me.

"If a chap were shut out of Paradise with you," he said, peevishly, "he'd never need to complain of hot weather! If Dives had caught a glimpse of you he'd have preferred your icy society to the drop of water he wanted old Thing-um-bob to fetch him! I never saw such a hard-hearted lovely girl! Never, no, never!"

He, too, rested his elbows on the railing, and looked down.

"Fortune with her wheel downstairs"—he spoke less peevishly—"Venus on guard over yonder"—nodding toward the statue in the niche—"meaning, I suppose, that the Goddess of Love is Queen up here!"

I was silent.

"If I had been Paris," he continued, "I'd have bestowed that historic apple upon—Athena!"

"Then you don't care for a beautiful wife?"

"That's so, Miss—Athena! I forgot they'd each made a bid for that apple. Curious what a mischievous fruit the apple has always been, from Eve's time down!"

"Not now," I said, earnestly. "It's a very healthy fruit. So many nice dishes, desserts especially, can be made with apples."

He burst into wild laughter, exclaiming, when his strange mirth was over:

"You'll be the death of me some day! I never saw anyone to beat you! But, as you just reminded me, Paris got a wife for that apple—such a wife! I wonder the offer tempted him!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"His price," I said. I thought of Lord Ebbrides—and the doll.

"I'd give a great deal to know yours!" cried Randal. He was in earnest.

"Nemesis?" I said, glancing at the emerald.

"No"—very slowly—"no, I think not. To confess the truth, I have a very strange feeling about this ring—a creepy feeling. However"—laughing rather affectedly—"I'm determined that nothing but death shall part us. Death—or the pawnbroker! As for your price, Miss Dean, I shall learn it simply by waiting."

I smiled, if a little sadly. I wished to be civil, but his nonsense wearied me.

"Instead of being shallow—as you say you are—you are very deep," he continued. "You play your cards with consummate skill."

There was, I fancied, a sneer lurking in the sweet tones of his carefully modulated voice. Could he imagine that I liked the favors heaped upon me, I wondered. Did he believe me capable of truckling to Madam Erranti for the sake of obtaining silken raiment and refurbished rooms? Impossible, I decided, but I sighed. Such thoughts were unpleasant.

"Don't sigh," said Randal; "you have, for once, your sister goddess on your side." He pointed toward the Venus. I looked with cold dislike at her sensual face. How might anyone admire her? "She's a beauty, Miss Athena; but she's not a patch on you! Come"—coaxingly—"what did you do to gain her good-will? Offer her a pair of turtle doves, or a basket of flowers?"

"In the company of three such powers you should tremble," I said, lightly.

"Three?" Randal looked at me searchingly. "Oh, you count in Fortune. Why, when we can't

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

see her from here? I'd like to have her with me for once. I do have the most beastly luck! Lose straight along. And Erranti, who doesn't need money—he's rich as a Jew—always wins. He needn't tremble, as you call it, in presence of the three divinities. Fortune is for him; Venus—loves gold. As for the third"—he smiled into my eyes—"what about her, Athena?"

I did not smile back, but looked at him gravely. He was indeed ignorant.

"The gods themselves cannot buy Nemesis, the Avenger."

"By Jove! I forgot her," he cried, his eyes upon the ring. "I was thinking of you."

"She will not forget," I said, slowly, "and you will do well to—remember."

The door of the Blue Room opened, and Madam's chair whirled into the hall. She was turning its wheels herself with a strength born of anger.

"Vite, Athena!" she cried. "Come to me, help me away! Ah, the disappointment! It cannot be changed—too late! It is in Philip's blood, this love of rich stuffs, I cannot quell it—born in him! 'Let all be simple,' I said, 'and white, for a young girl,' thinking of muslin only. White it is, but of the richest silk, the costliest lace—and lilies everywhere! Philip is mad! No, no"—as I would have entered the room—"not till to-morrow. Philip would be displeased—as you are now, who love simple things, as a young girl should."

She gave the wheels another violent push. Her hands shook, her eyes were full of tears. The chair turned the wrong way, and, like some vicious creature, rolled swiftly to the staircase. There was an instant of suspense, then—I had distanced it in its race and stopped its headlong rush downward.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Randal, realizing the danger a second too late to catch the chair, ran forward to help me.

Madam clung to me, moaning, her feeble nerves upset by the near approach to disaster.

"It was death," she muttered, "death, death, death!"

"Wine," I said to Randal, who was as white as Madam. He brought it quickly, and tried to soothe her by recurring to her remarks about her son. This was unfortunate, frightening anew the poor old lady.

"Send him away," she whimpered. "He says I talked too much, and of Philip, of Philip's blood. Send him away, Athena." He went, gladly.

Next the upholsterer appeared. Not having seen the almost accident, he thought Madam's agitation due to disappointment, and tip-toed about uneasily, anxious to be off yet not daring to go. Something had to be done, and quickly. Madam was making herself ill.

"I shall see the Blue Room for myself," I announced, abruptly. "Will you come with me, Madam, or remain here?"

Madam sat upright, stopped moaning, and brushed away her tears, that she might see clearly.

"Philip will be angry. *Mon Dieu*, he will be furious!"

"What matter?" I spoke placidly. "The room is for me, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Madam laughed. Her eyes, tear-stained, began to sparkle with mischief. She clapped her hands.

"A secret from Philip!" she cried. "And to-morrow thou shalt affect surprise!—wonder!—pleasure! Come quickly, *chérie*, I cannot wait for thy opinion."

The Blue Room was no longer blue, but white and gold. Windows, bed, toilet-table, were draped alike

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

with rich white silk trimmed with heavy lace. Through the silk ran a pattern of white lilies, while lilies of gold looped the draperies into place. There were white rugs on the inlaid floor, white cushions in the basket-chairs; on the walls enormous mirrors, framed in dull gold. The effect was handsome, if odd.

"How does it please thee, Athena?" said Madam. "Too elaborate, rich, heavy—for a young girl, yes?"

"It is beautiful," I said; then, to the unhappy foreman, "You deserve credit, sir, for your swiftness and skill."

The idea of living behind such a mass of drapery made me feel faint. I detested every kind of suffocating luxury. Yet, how could I be ungracious when everyone meant to be kind! Since I must submit to being smothered I determined to do so with a good grace, and I admired everything. Madam and the upholsterer were pleased. The latter, indeed, became garrulous, describing his difficulties until cut short by Madam.

"It is done," she cried, impatiently, "so why talk about it? I am pleased that this young lady is pleased, and Philip will be pleased because—Athena, I am getting mixed up in my head! And it's your fault"—turning upon the astonished foreman. "You worry me to death! Go away, do! Have luncheon and return to your shop, good man, only go, go, go!"

He obeyed, thankfully.

"I see that sly cat, Ellen, in the hall, a sneaking creature!" Madam went on. "Call her to stay with me, and go thyself, dear angel, for Julie. She may now see thy room. Go, Athena, else she will be spiteful all day—the French devil! I detest her, but go!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I met Claude in the lower hall coming for orders about luncheon. He opened the door into Madam's private corridor for me. This corridor ended on one side in a glass door, like that in Madam's room, which opened on the veranda. It now stood wide, and I looked through. Beneath a vine-covered trellis stood two people, Julie and Randal. I hesitated before calling her, and Randal, putting his hand under her firm chin, tilted her face upward and kissed her.

Involuntarily I drew back into the main hall, and Claude closed the door of the corridor noiselessly.

"What was you wishing, Miss Dean?" He spoke in subdued tones.

I told him.

"Then you just go upstairs again, Miss Dean, and I'll deliver your message. Don't you mind about what you just seen—Land, they're always goin' on like that! Julie, she's French, so I s'pose she don't know no better, poor thing, and as for that R. St. J.—that embri-o D.D.—which, I'm told, stands for minister—he's no more nor less than a bad egg!"

XV

It was Madam's birthday, and seven o'clock in the morning; a lovely day, with sunshine and a soft little breeze from the southwest. I stood by my window enjoying the beautiful view, and regretting that it was my last morning in my little sky-parlor. The new room was at the back of the house, its eastern windows overhung by the knoll, its one north window commanding a view of Beverley Towers only. I said to myself that doubtless Mr. Erranti was as much disturbed by the change as I. In spite of his flowery speeches and compliments, he probably considered me a very great nuisance. Did he grudge the affection Madam showed for me? I looked ruefully at my lace-trimmed muslin—Madam had commanded me to be fine, and idle, on her birthday—and wished she were less oddly kind.

The sweet tones of the gong, languidly tapped by Claude, here put an end to my reflections. Philip met me in the dining-room. I looked at him a little wistfully. Was he vexed because of the room? He answered the look with a kind smile, and said, "You have been with us a month to-day, Miss Dean. I dare hope the first month of many years to come."

I thanked him for his wish. I did not share it.

"I bring you a rose, one of your near relations." He placed a half-open tea-rose—the dew still upon its lovely petals—by my plate.

I admired its beauty, thanked him again, and laid the flower down.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I hoped you might wear it." He looked disappointed.

"Have a pin?" drawled Claude, taking a pin-cushion, a red silk heart, from his breast-pocket.

Accepting the pin, I fastened the rose in my gown.

"Thank you," murmured Philip. "I wish it were a white moss-rose; it would suit you best. I am fond of roses. Once they were my favorite flowers—but not now."

For politeness' sake I inquired his present preference.

"Lilies—white lilies! When I look at you, Miss Dean, I always think of lilies. I'm sure you were a lily in a previous state of existence. A pure white garden-lily. There is nothing lovelier," and he looked affectionately across the table at me.

Claude slipped swiftly into his pantry, either feeling *de trop* or on the verge of one of his giggling fits. If I had not been angry I might have shared his feelings. What did Mr. Erranti mean by talking such arrant nonsense to his mother's companion?

"I have displeased you, Athena." He spoke earnestly, but there was a gleam of amusement in his brilliant eyes. "I won't offend you again—by thinking aloud."

Erect and haughty at the head of the table I sat silent, ignoring both speech and man. Something in his manner grated upon me far more than foolish compliments warranted. These, born of his Italian blood, meant nothing; but his way of looking at me— In vain I strove to understand my resentment, but it remained. I rose from the table, thankful the meal was over.

"Come into the library and let me make peace with you, Athena," said Philip, holding out his hand. "I can't be happy when you are displeased."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Because of Madam I kept silence, and so grew the more angry.

"Even if you are vexed, Athena, you haughty child"—laying his slender brown hand upon my arm—"you won't refuse to let me discharge my debt toward you, surely!"

There lurked amusement in the would-be humble tones; his touch was a caress. My flowing sleeve left my arm bare, and the remembrance of Madam vanished when her son forgot himself. I looked at him as I felt. I did not speak. There was no need.

"I beg your pardon," he said, and he released me, as angry as I.

A long silence followed, which was at last broken by Philip. He again asked me into the library, but his voice was coldly business-like. I went without a word, satisfied by his change of manner, and took the chair he offered me beside his desk. When he drew out his check-book I spoke, begging him to make the check out payable to Mrs. Cornelia de Rohan Spuyten—forty dollars—and asked for the remainder in ready money. He nodded stiffly, wrote the check, and, taking a thick roll of bills from his pocket, selected one, laid it on the slip of paper, and pushed it toward me. Then I realized, as I coolly picked up the money, that I had dreaded the payment of my salary! Anger had chased away such foolish sensitiveness, fortunately.

Philip watched me with an air of sullen gloom, until, remembering my manners, I thanked him, when his expression changed to one of great kindness.

"My dear," he said, leaning across his desk, "you make me feel ashamed! You are wretchedly underpaid for your really inestimable services. No, don't speak until I have confessed. Do you know"—dropping into the softest whisper—"I haven't the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

faintest idea what you ought to receive! Have you?"

I shook my head. "No," I said, "I know nothing about such positions as mine, only I am sure you give me more than I have really earned, Mr. Erranti."

"Nonsense, arrant nonsense, Athena! I don't know how we managed to live at all before you came. I wanted a housekeeper, but when *maman* asked for a companion, I thought it but one of her momentary whims. I told Julie to attend to the matter, and gave it no further thought till coming home I found—you! I wonder your friends and relations didn't make better arrangements for you!"

"My few friends," I said, sadly, "are simple folk, as ignorant of money matters as I. I have no near relations, only one cousin, not an agreeable person. She, also, dislikes me."

"Then you are quite alone in the world?" Philip's voice sounded as if he hoped I might be. I looked at him in astonishment, but his handsome face was mask-like, expressing nothing.

"Quite alone," I said.

"Well, you shall have all the money you want, at any rate. God knows I don't lack that, if other good things are denied me! Here, child"—and my strange employer tossed the fat roll of bills into my lap—"put it in your pocket, and when you want more come to me. I ask no greater happiness than to be your banker—the more you ask at my hands the better pleased I shall be, if only you will be—kind, Athena!"

I was at my wits' end. Mechanically I replaced the money on the desk. Madam had said that Philip was always kind, but sometimes—odd! Did odd mean daft? Had he, as the Scotch say, a bee in his bonnet? His behavior pointed that way. Or,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

since Madam had said, that he looked upon me as a niece, did he wish me to understand that I was now formally adopted into the family? I was silent for some time after his remarkable speech. He did not disturb my thoughts, but watched me closely. I raised my eyes and met his steady gaze. He smiled faintly.

"Weighing me in the balance, Athena? May I not be found wanting!"

His voice was very sweet, but I did not want him for an uncle. I did not quite like him. Did he know, I wondered, that he treated me too familiarly?

"Mr. Erranti."

"Yes, dear child."

"May I ask you not to call me——"

"No, no, Athena, don't ask me that! Please don't look stern any more! There"—putting the money back in his pocket—"if you don't want it now, come for it when you do. If money doesn't please you—I thought all women were spendthrifts—perhaps something else may. This, for instance."

He took from a drawer in his desk a stiletto, long, sharp, terrible, and laid it before me. "Look at the emerald in the hilt, Athena. A beautiful one, in spite of its nicked corner. Shall I have it taken out and set in some other way? It is yours, my child, to do with as you please—only let me use my mother's pet name for you."

Madam had kept my secret, since he thought me Augusta Dean! I sighed. What a trying pair they were, mother and son, with their rich gifts and strange whims. Then, examining the emerald, I forgot them both, it was so like one my mother had worn as a brooch. Not only the same size, shape, and color, but nicked in the same way. Slipping my finger over its smooth surface, touching its

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

one roughened corner, I was again a little child, playing with my mother's well-remembered gem.

"You will keep it," murmured a sweet voice at my elbow, "and grant me the favor I beg?"

As I returned to the present, with a little shiver of discomfort, someone knocked.

"Come in!" cried Philip, sharply, angry at the interruption, and Julie entered.

She had opened her lips to speak when her eyes fell upon the deadly bauble in my hand, and the words died away unspoken. A look of terror crept into her eyes, her color faded. She shrank back as if to leave the room, but her master stopped her.

"What is it, Julie? You surely did not disturb me for nothing?"

I glanced quickly at him, for there was cruel amusement in his voice, and his smile expressed cruel enjoyment of her fear. She made another effort to speak, and again failed. I was sorry for her.

"See, Julie," I said, holding up the stiletto, "this emerald is exactly like the one in my mother's favorite brooch—you remember? The one set in diamonds—she wore it constantly! It had a notch in one corner, you have not forgotten, I am sure, and, strangely enough, this one has, too. Curious, *n'est-ce pas*, Julie?"

I had done my best. Rarely did I string so many words together. Julie tried to collect herself.

"Madame Derohan's brooch?" she faltered, "Madame Derohan's brooch?"—then grew paler than before.

"You must be ill—or crazy!" cried Philip, sternly, and pushed her from the room, bidding her ask Claude for a glass of wine. Then, resuming his former place, he leaned both arms on his desk and looked questioningly at me. "And now," he said, his voice silky, but an oddly fierce expression in his

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

eyes, "may I understand what this means? What does Julie know of your mother—or her brooches? Why did she speak of Madame de Rohan? Why are you handing over your few pennies to a Mrs. *de Rohan* Spuyten? What is this mystery? Or am I to be denied your confidence as—as—your friendship?"

At last we were in sympathy. I, too, detested mysteries, and could well understand his feelings. I made haste to clear up this coil by telling him of Mrs. Spuyten's loan, and of her changing my name.

"She is very snobbish," I said, "and I owe her money—*voilà tout!*"

"And Julie—and the brooch?"

"Julie was my mother's maid; so, of course, she knew her jewels."

"Your name, then, is—?" Philip leaned forward, his eyes a-light, his voice eager.

"Athena Derohan," I said, smiling a little at his eagerness, "and now you know all."

I would have risen, but he motioned me to remain seated.

"One moment," he urged, "just one moment! This is so very surprising."

He went to the window and stared out, absorbed in thought, apparently.

Why what I had just told him proved so very interesting I failed to understand. I turned my attention to the great emerald in the dagger's hilt, and fell to recalling the days when its double had flashed at my mother's throat, until I suddenly remembered this one had been given me, on a condition! I looked at the graceful figure in the window with a sensation of actual dislike. How wearisome the man was! I did not want his money, his weapons, or his jewels. I wanted to be allowed to attend to my work in peace, to jog along soberly in accordance

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

with my nature. I have been called obstinate. I made another effort to gain my own way.

"Mr. Erranti."

"Yes, child."

He remained looking out of the window, his back toward me, as if unable to give me his entire attention; but I continued:

"Mr. Erranti, since it pleases your mother to keep my name a secret, I think it might better remain one. She has little to amuse her."

"Your will is my law, Athena."

I looked at him in despair. Another foolish speech!

"It is kind of you to say so, Mr. Erranti. I need not hesitate, then, to ask this favor——"

"Name it!"—his voice was vibrant with pleasure, his eyes shone, he left the window.

"Please call me Miss Dean in future."

He sat down again by his desk.

"Athena," he said, quietly, and as if he weighed each word before speaking, "Athena, a belief so sweet has arisen in my mind I hardly dare yield to it, for what if I should be disappointed! Athena, my dear child, are you the daughter of Charles Derohan?"

"Yes," I said, wondering what was coming.

"Of the Charles Derohan who died—in May?"

"Yes."

"Athena"—holding out both hands to me—"your father was my dearest friend—I loved him." Philip's voice shook, his eyes were full of sadness, his expression was one of almost passionate regret.

"You knew my father?" I exclaimed in amazement. "When and where?"

"In Wall Street."

I shrank back, involuntarily

"Athena! Surely you won't do me so gross an

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

injustice as to think that of me—of me, his most sincere friend!”

The rare color stained my cheeks. I was ashamed of my suspicion.

“If he had listened to me”—Philip spoke very gravely—“he would never have dabbled in those wretched speculations. He was too generous in his belief in others, too noble-hearted for such work. To think”—taking my hands in his—“that Charles Derohan’s daughter has found a home beneath my roof! It is almost too great a happiness to be true!”

Then I had the joy of listening to a very beautiful tribute to my dead. It was sweet to me. If, now and again, Philip dwelt lovingly upon little characteristics that I had never observed, little ways that I had not known I inherited from my father—I was never thought to resemble him greatly—I realized but the more clearly how much more discerning strangers are than kin, on points of resemblance. Philip did not say how much I was like him. It was from his description that I learned of my inheritance.

Ashamed of my past doubts of one who had been my father’s friend, anxious to atone for secret distrust, I went against my nature, which is reserved, and, of course, went too far.

“I hope you may always call me Athena,” I said, smiling through a mist of tears. “I am sorry I spoke as I did just now. You see, I did not know.”

The sadness cleared from the handsome dark face.

“And you—you won’t say ‘Mr. Erranti’ in that formal way again?”

Once more my color rose. This was more than I had bargained for, yet how draw back?

“When you think of me, Athena, do you call me ‘Mr. Erranti’—or ‘Philip’?”

Because of Madam’s constant use of his Christian

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

name I did think of him as "Philip." I flushed crimson. Philip's eyes sparkled.

"I am answered!" he cried, gayly; then, with sudden seriousness, "No, call me what you please, Athena, only give me the right to be your friend, as I was your father's."

I made a great effort, conquered my reserve—and a certain incomprehensible feeling of repugnance—rose to my feet, and, holding out my hand, said, very gravely:

"Because of your affection for my father I accept your friendship—Philip."

He bent low over my hand, raising it to his lips. He did not look at me, and I saw he had paled slightly under his tan. Seeing him so deeply moved I tried to help him recover himself.

"Lock up the stiletto, please," I said, lightly, "and never offer it to a friend. Knives cut friendship."

He laughed, a little unsteadily.

"I may settle with that Mrs. Spuyten, Athena?"

"Certainly not."

"Your father's own daughter!" he murmured.

"Please remember that Madam is not to know—that you know!" I said, anxious to preserve her small amusement. Then I recollected another secret that must be shared. To tell it was unpleasant, somehow. I felt suddenly a strong desire to run away from my father's friend. I took my courage in both hands.

"I must tell you that I have seen the room you and Madam were kind enough to have refurnished for me." I stopped, a little out of breath.

Philip laughed. His eyes flashed.

"Little daughter of Eve! So you couldn't wait! I'm thankful you possess some of the ordinary feminine weaknesses! I began to believe you a veritable little goddess of stone," and again he laughed.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

To be thought a second Mrs. Bluebeard—a woman I had always despised—was unpleasant, but without betraying Madam's little adventure I could not explain. Then I remembered Madam wished her son to think the room a surprise to me. I found myself tangled in a mesh of falsehoods.

"If you don't object," I said, shamefacedly, "I will pretend not to have seen it before."

"Just as you choose, dear child." Philip looked astonished. "Of course I'll keep your little secret. What I don't understand is why you told me at all."

"I am a poor actress."

"You thought I should see through you, so told?"—very much amused. "I had no idea you were such a crafty little person! As for this toy"—playing with the dagger—"I must find you a less deadly *gage d'amitié*."

"The top of the morning to you both!" cried a gay voice, and Randal strolled in by the window. "What's that, Erranti? By all the gods, a dagger! Better not play with edged tools, old man, or you'll get your fingers cut." He glanced at me.

Philip smiled, and locked it away in his desk.

"Dear me," said Randal, plaintively, lounging into a chair, "I should like to know what you two quiet people talk about when you're all, all alone! Do you talk or simply—" He broke off, glancing inquisitively from me to Philip. "She's a sphinx"—pointing a solemn finger at me—"and you"—turning upon Philip—"are a volcano! You're quiet enough now, old man, and we, so to speak, sport gayly about you, and gather flowers on your manly brow; but some day you'll explode—and may I be there to see!"

"I'll blow you into fragments," laughed Philip. He was in high spirits. "You deserve to be knocked to bits for your nonsense!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"How about the Sphinx? I doubt if even hot lava would melt her. Is she a sphinx, or only a pagan, caught young and educated among Christians? Do you know what she says, Erranti, when I tell her I can't make her out? Is there any reason that you should, Mr. St. John?"

I started, for it was my own voice that I heard. Randal was a marvellous mimic. Philip frowned.

"Enough of that." He spoke sternly, not hiding his displeasure. "Confine your nonsense to me, if you must indulge in it."

"I'm sorry you're mad, Erranti," said Randal, quickly. "I didn't mean to be saucy. Miss Dean has such a wonderful voice—the kind of grave, sweet tones that belong to goddesses. I couldn't help trying it on. Please forgive me, Miss Dean."

I smiled my forgiveness, and said I must go.

"No, please, not yet," said Randal. "Just stay long enough to prove you're not offended. Say, I bet you five dollars that, for all you're such a sphinx, I can tell what you've been saying to Erranti. May I give a guess?"

Had he been eavesdropping? He was, I thought, none too scrupulous. Before I could answer Philip cried out:

"I bet you fifty you can't——"

"Done!" Randal was overjoyed. "She was telling you how she saved your mother's life yesterday."

A profound silence followed. Randal, thinking he had hit the mark, prepared for new triumphs.

"I'll bet another five that I know something she has not told you."

"Fifty that you fail," said Philip, an odd inflection in his voice.

"She has seen the changes in the Blue Room," said Randal, smiling in his unpleasant way.

"You have lost in both—as you deserve," said

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Philip, coldly. He followed me to the door, opening it for me. "This evening"—speaking so softly that even Randal's sharp ears must fail to catch his words—"I shall try to tell you how grateful I am, Athena."

I found it difficult to meet the admiration in his eyes, and was glad to hasten across the hall to Madam's quarters. I went so swiftly I nearly collided with Julie on her way to fetch me. She still looked pale and shaken. I asked how she felt.

"Better, Mademoiselle." Then, with evident effort, "May I be permitted to ask a question?"

"Yes."

"That—that dagger! It is yours, Mademoiselle?"

"No," I said, "it belongs to Mr. Erranti. Was it the dagger that frightened you, Julie? Or were you ill?"

"The cold steel"—shivering as she spoke—"the sight of the cold steel. From a child I have been so. A sharp knife, a dagger's point, makes me ill. I rejoice this weapon belongs not to Mademoiselle."

She darted into Madam's room, as if wishing to be rid of the subject. Yet she had looked, in spite of her words, as though sorry the dagger was not mine. I remembered that when, as a child, Julie had been sent with me to my fencing-master, she had watched with much interest, and no symptoms of illness, the play of the rapiers. However, people were said to change as they advanced through life. Probably Julie had lost her nerve. Poor Julie!

XVI

On Madam's birthday her one anxiety was that everyone might rejoice that she had been born. To that end she gave largely to all her dependents, and was amiable and easy to please all day. I was installed in my new room with much ceremony, Philip so cleverly taking it for granted that I saw it for the first time, that I had nothing to do save admire. At six o'clock Julie was sent to dress me in the brocade. To please Madam I had consented to wear her diamonds as well, and I was very magnificent.

"Are you satisfied with me, Julie?" I asked, walking to the end of the room that she might judge the better.

"*Mon Dieu, oui!*"—surveying me through half-shut eyes, as an artist his work. "But it is ever agreeable to make the toilette for Mademoiselle. Some, though beautiful, are unable to do credit to a work of art, but even as a child Mademoiselle might be depended upon."

The silver thread outlining the lilies caught the light as I moved, gleaming in a dozen places at once. The brocade was a work of art.

"The ornaments are old-fashioned," she continued, eying with disapproval the low-hanging zig-zag necklace, "and Madame and I contend for powdering the hair. Monsieur protests, however. 'Dress it high, weave through it the *rivière*, but no powder, Julie.' Madame argued in vain. Monsieur

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

said it, the hair, was 'of shining gold!' So—no powder!"

On the staircase landing, when I went to dinner, I stood enchanted. For the gardeners had transformed the great marble hall into a forest of flowers and climbing vines. Fortune's wheel was clogged with blossoms—stopped for the hour. I glanced over my shoulder. Had Venus been forgotten? I caught myself hoping so—but no. She wore a crown of roses, and a long wreath of ferns and flowers hung over her naked limbs.

Opposite the staircase, between two pillars, was a low platform covered with tiger-skins, the stuffed heads thrust out as though guarding the easy-chair, Madam's throne, placed above them. Then two cavaliers emerged from the library and came to meet me—Philip, with Randal St. John. Both men wore powder. Philip was in white satin, diamond buckles on his high-heeled shoes; Randal in pale-blue silk, a gold-laced hat under his arm, enamelled snuff-box in his hand. A gay pair! They bowed low, I courtesied profoundly, and Philip, stepping to my side, placed in my hand a fan with jewelled sticks.

"The *gage d'amitié*," he whispered.

I thanked him. I was pleased. I never used a fan.

Madam now appeared, magnificent in her white silk brocaded in pink roses, and lace cap fastened with diamond pins. Claude pushed her chair, and, conscious that all eyes were upon him, advanced with mincing step and fiercely solemn demeanor. He wore a red velvet coat, black satin knee-breeches, and silver-buckled shoes. He was superb, but grandly overlooked the fact, while Madam was at no pains to conceal her enjoyment of her own and her footman's magnificence.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Charming, charming!" she cried, looking about her. "Ah, you, too, all are charming, as I, also, and this good Claude here! But, *mon Dieu*, Athena, thou art the Queen! *Ma chère*, how wonderful thou art! My diamonds suit thy splendid beauty well. Give her a name for to-night, Randal."

"The Queen of Hearts, of course."

"The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts"—no, no, *vaurien!* It's bread, not tarts, that Athena makes! Excellent bread! Made for me because she loves me. Like me, she is a *grande dame*, and that is why she makes it so well; for the well-born can cook better than cooks, sew better than our maids—yet are ever great ladies! But come"—nodding her head at Randal—"a name for to-night."

"She might be Jack Frost's wife in that gown. It gleams like frost-work. The diamonds would do for icicles."

Madam clapped her hands.

"The Frost Queen! You are a good lad, Randal."

"What's that sparkling in your lap, *Maman?*" asked Philip.

"My rings—for Athena to wear. You won't refuse to-night, Athena?"

Her eyes sparkled with mischief. She was like an elfish child. I slipped them on my fingers. They were many, and my fingers felt heavy and clogged. Madam beamed with satisfaction at gaining the long-disputed point. Randal watched her curiously.

"You're very different from most women, *Madam Erranti*"—he spoke in honeyed tones—"when you have a daughter-in-law you won't mind handing over your jewels."

Madam pursed up her lips, frowning.

"I shall never have a daughter-in-law, sir!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Dinner was announced, and the question in his eyes was not asked. Madam had my usual place at the head of the table, while I sat at Philip's right hand. It was a merry party. Madam and Randal talked, Philip and I listened. The dinner was not long because of Madam. Her cake was to be cut in the hall in the presence of the servants, who were each to have a piece. Suddenly we heard music.

"The band from Droneton," explained Philip. "The servants are to dance in the carriage-house later. I am to open the ball with Norah!"

"What a pity it's Saturday night!" said Madam, delighted with the music.

"I'll make that all right—I understand clocks—but don't tell," laughed Randal. He had drunk a great quantity of wine, but appeared little affected by it. I hoped his legs might prove as strong as his head.

"Athena, you won't refuse to drink my health?" cried Madam, anxiously.

"Are you a temperance girl? Do you wear a blue ribbon, color of my eyes, in your bonny yellow hair?" demanded Randal.

I did not answer, but, clinking a glass of champagne against Madam's, drained it, with best wishes for her health.

"You'd make a splendid wife for me," said Randal, plaintively. "I've all the vices, and you've none! You'd cure me of my evil habits and turn me into a sweet little parson. Wish I could muster courage to pop the question this very minute!"

"Nonsense!" cried Madam, vehemently. "You're not good enough for my Athena, and far too young—Sower of Wild Oats!"

"How about Erranti?"—a wicked look in his blue eyes. "He must be old enough. It's time he settled down—to reap what he's sown! Won't he do?"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Madam pushed her chair back from the table. She looked frightened.

"I want to cut my cake," she whimpered. "Philip, push me into the hall, quick!"

He obeyed instantly, and, placing her in the chair on the platform, had the servants summoned. Randall and I following, found that during our absence at dinner the hall had been lighted by dozens of Chinese lanterns, hung very artistically among the vine-draped pillars. Glancing through the front door, which stood wide, I saw their gayly colored lights outlining the avenue as far as the stables.

The musicians now struck up a lively march, and the servants entered, headed by Claude, who carried the cake on a silver salver. Solemnly he deposited his precious burden upon a little table in front of Madam, and joined his fellows, drawn up in two rows on either side. They all wore fancy costumes, Philip's surprise for his mother. He had shown skill in his selection. Julie was a vivandière, her stealthy husband, a bandit; the meek Dolan, a shepherd with his crook, and handsome Norah, *La Belle Chocolatière*.

It was a pretty scene, the gay figures grouped against the background of greenery. Madam was as happy as a child. But one anxiety marred the joy of the moment. The fear lest her favorites might not secure the prizes hidden in the cake! This last was a masterpiece. It had occupied Norah's thoughts for days past. It was a gigantic pink heart, the depression at the top graced with a large bow in pink candy. I saw at once that Claude's pocket pincushion — probably Norah's gift — had been taken for a model. Compliments were showered upon the happy cook, who beamed with triumphant satisfaction.

No candles burned around the cake. For some

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

reason Madam would not have them. She said she feared them. Philip and Randal lifted the salver, and, stepping up on the platform, held it across Madam's lap, while, holding the knife with difficulty in her crippled hands, she made a slight incision.

"I want Athena to divide it," she said. "Cut it, dear child, and give it to my people."

As I obeyed, Randal stepped forward.

"My friends," he began, "I hope you admire as much as I do the great good sense Madam has shown in her selection of the fittest to divide this cake! Pray observe the skill and dexterity exhibited by Miss Dean in making a lasting impression upon the large heart prostrate before her! Only long practice in the cutting up, and lacerating of hearts, could give her such deftness and precision of touch! My own organ"—clasping both hands on his silken waistcoat—"which Miss Dean has already made mincemeat of, aches in sympathy with the one she is calmly slicing." The bashful Dolan here gave vent to a loud guffaw, to his own and his companions' distress. "I have a sweet vengeance in prospect," continued Randal, elated by this applause—he had drunk far too much champagne. "To-night that cruel young lady will repose in a new bed, the posts of which, after the fashion of girls, she will name, and the name of which she dreams will be that of the happy man. But to every post I'll hang my card, so——"

Mr. Erranti pushed him gently aside.

"My mother wishes you to know that in the cake there are three prizes—a gold ring, a gold horse-shoe, and a gold piece."

"The latter worth ten dollars!" struck in the irrepressible Randal. "Going, going, going! Ladies and gentlemen! Love, good-luck, and the promise of wealth! Who will have a try? Whoever finds

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

the ring will shortly be united to the beloved of his—or her—heart! The horseshoe, as we all know, brings good luck. As for the ten-dollar gold piece—well, I guess we all have a use for such a find!”—a titter of delighted amusement from the servants—“I mean to have three pieces, so’s to be sure to get something. Miss Dean says I may have hers.”

“No, no,” cried Madam, much disturbed. “You can’t have more than your share, Randal. I want Athena to keep her own.”

“He’s only joking, *maman*,” said Philip, soothingly.

“I don’t know,” grumbled Madam; “he seems a greedy fellow.”

To prevent further discussion I told Claude to distribute plates, while I followed with the cake. I was careful that after everyone had a slice none should be left, and had cut it to that end. Like Madam, I found I was devoured by anxiety lest the prizes should go wrong. It was with a sharp pang of regret that I saw Ellen, the sly housemaid, draw the gold piece from her slice. Next I feared that I might be unlucky enough to get something; but Claude found the horseshoe, which he gallantly presented to Norah, and Dolan, a notorious woman-hater, got the ring! Loud was the laughter and many the jests when this happened. Randal at once offered to propose for him, in case he had not courage. The ring must be used. While this nonsense was going on Madam begged me to grant her one more favor. Julie, she said, had told her I could dance the minuet. Would I dance it for her on this, her birth-night?

“Philip will be thy partner.”

I could not plead forgetfulness, although I had not danced since I was thirteen. I have a retentive memory. I did not like to refuse her. So the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

servants ranged themselves on either side the spacious hall, the musicians played the old-time measure, and Philip and I went through with the stately dance. Philip was grace itself. His splendid costume set off his dark beauty to the greatest advantage. Never had belle a more gallant cavalier. I could not wonder at the hum of admiration that came from the little group of spectators when, the dance over, he led me before his mother's dais and bowed low. But Madam, strangely enough, had only praise for me.

"You swam through the dance like a swan, Athena," she said. "Never have I seen so stately, so beautiful a creature!" Then, turning to her son, she told him, coolly, that he had really done very well. He seemed content, for he smiled and kissed her hand.

"Now, good people," she continued, "you may each ask a favor at my hands, and, if possible, it shall be granted. I hope and pray"—speaking to herself—"they'll ask something easy! Athena"—raising her voice again—"lovely child, you may begin."

Kneeling before her I whispered my wish, which was instantly granted.

"Poor child, poor child"—patting my cheek—"I'm a selfish old woman not to have thought of it! Forgive me!"

It was amusing to watch Madam's expression as, one by one, the servants made their requests. I knew at once who gave trouble and who not. Philip often came to her assistance. The curious little ceremony over, they bade their mistress good-night, thanked her, and departed for the stables in company with the musicians.

"I'm so tired," said Madam, suddenly petulant. "I want to go to bed."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"May I care for you to-night?" I asked. "Julie wants so much to see the ball opened."

Philip's face darkened, and he called sharply to Julie, who was vanishing through the door with Randal.

"Attend to your mistress," he said, sternly, "and don't attempt again to shirk your duties."

She murmured that I had promised, that she had wished for the first dance.

"You forget yourself strangely to-night," said her master. "Remember what your position is here—what it would be elsewhere. No more of this. Madam is tired; take her to bed."

Pale and frightened, she wheeled her mistress away without a word. I was sorry, but might not interfere.

"Where is your wrap, little woman?" Philip asked. He looked kind and affectionate, but his manner had lost the something that jarred upon me before. Since learning my true name it had vanished, and because of his friendship for my father his familiarity was natural enough. He fetched my wrap, and, insisting that I should wear it, led me out upon the veranda and placed me in a big chair by Madam's glass door.

"Wait here for me until I have done my duty by Norah," he said, "then I will enjoy myself if I may."

I urged him to remain for the ball. He laughed.

"A great inducement! Dancing with a crowd of servants—and you here. I shall be gone but a few moments. Peggy is in the upper hall, and"—whistling shrilly—"here's Don to stay by you. Are you afraid, Athena? I shouldn't leave you if there were the least danger."

I was not afraid. Don settled himself with a thump at my feet, and Philip disappeared beneath the black arch of the avenue, that, in spite of the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

brilliant moonlight, looked like the mouth of a cavern. The lanterns' feeble glimmer had the effect of fire-flies, hardly lighting it more. The avenue was dark even on summer noons, and because of the green mould which clothed the north side of the trees, and the moss and fungi spreading beneath the tangled underbrush, looked damp even when it was not. Its mile of impenetrable shade I found inexpressibly dismal. Indeed, the woods shut in the house so closely, that from my position near Madam's door I saw little of the heavens. I sat quite still, Don slumbering at my feet. The moon shone down upon us, a faint breeze brought the sound of the dance-music, and an odd sensation as of one awake in a world of dreams took possession of me. Then the glass door opened and Julie appeared.

"Madame wishes for you, Mademoiselle. I may go?"

She spoke crossly, evidently feeling I was to blame for her disappointment.

"I have tried to be good all day," whimpered Madam, as I sat down beside her; "it has tired me so! I am sick of it."

"You have made everyone happy," I said, soothingly.

"Not you," she cried, "not you, Athena! In mourning, and I made you dance—clad in brocade and jewels! A wicked old woman! The devil's own! You are an angel—and I made you sin."

Surprised that she had seen so clearly when I had imagined I had successfully hidden my distaste for my rôle, and not a little mortified by my failure, I said what I could to comfort her. This set her on a new tack.

"It's made Philip grow more fond of you," she went on, "and that's a good thing. It will make me more comfortable. He says he feels you belong to

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

us. I hope he may not change. Try to please him, Athena. Do as he wishes in everything. His anger is terrible. Never rouse it. Still, he is also wise, and old enough to be trusted. Forty, yes, forty, next month!" Then, relapsing into French, "Thou art beautiful; but, since he is old, thou canst be his companion without fear. To him thou art but a lovely child. With Randal, now! Ah, the difference! A *vaurien*, Randal—amiable, charming, *gentil*— But, be careful, Athena. Ah, I know, I know"—she wagged her head wisely—"what do I know? Ah, God"—with a swift change of tone—"too much, too much, too much! Kneel down and pray, Athena! God is angry, and I—I have forgotten how. Pray, pray, pray!" She flung herself down among her pillows, then, lifting herself and looking cautiously around, she whispered, "Did you know the devil was dead? Hush! I'll tell you who shot him——"

Pressing her hands close in mine, I knelt beside her bed, praying earnestly for the poor restless heart, and before long her regular breathing told me sleep had come. I heard Philip's step on the veranda. When I could release my hands and join him I found him leaning against the post of the veranda near my chair. He had flung aside his powdered wig. In the moonlight his close-cut hair looked like black velvet. His rich satin coat shimmered as he turned to meet me. He was magnificently handsome—unlike anyone else. As I looked at him, wondering at his odd beauty, Madam called, again awake. Philip went to her. When he returned he carried her guitar.

"She wishes me to sing," he said.

For an hour he sang to her, continuing long after she had fallen asleep—sang as though pouring out his heart in melody. Again, as on the night before

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

the Fourth, on the staircase, I forgot where I was—time, place, and everything—in listening to the magic of his voice. First, there were lullabies, French, Italian, German, then old ballads, at the last love-songs. When these ended the singer fell into long fits of musing, accompanying his thoughts with light touches on the strings, humming softly to himself. It was then I became conscious that he was not composed, as usual, but evidently laboring under some strong excitement which he strove to suppress.

"Athena," he said, breaking the long silence with the air of one who has come to a decision, "do you remember what Randal said at dinner to-night?"

"He said so many things."

I knew at once the remark to which he referred.

"He spoke about my having sown my wild oats"—leaning forward and looking up into my face. My expression evidently disappointing him, he continued:

"No, of course you don't remember—why should you? As Randal says, you are as calm, serene-eyed, passionless, as the goddess whose name you bear."

"Hush, what was that?" A distant shriek pierced the air.

"The whistle of a locomotive. The train rumbled past some time ago."

Another long silence. The moon slipped away behind the tree-tops, the music in the distance rose and fell on the night breeze. Philip swayed toward me, his hand on the arm of my chair.

"Athena, little Athena, will you——"

"Hush!" I whispered, "there is someone lurking in the wood-path."

Before the words had more than crossed my lips Philip was running lightly across the intervening stretch of grass to the little opening in the trees. I

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

heard an exclamation of surprise, a friendly greeting. Then Philip and a man walked slowly past in the shadow of the trees. Don, roused from his heavy sleep—heavy only because of Philip's protecting presence—got up, growling and staring. Fearing he might bark and wake Madam, I rose and caught him by the collar. My mantle slipped from my shoulders; the night-air was refreshing, but, remembering Madam's diamonds, I hastily muffled myself again. The two men, who had stopped to chat in the entrance to the avenue, moved on around the corner of the house. I had a mere glimpse of the stranger, a tall, broad-shouldered man, of graceful carriage, but I was haunted by the fancy that I had seen him before. Don flopped down at my feet, seeing all was well, and resumed his nap. I sank into my chair, as sleepy as he. It was long past my bedtime. When Philip returned the hall clock was chiming twelve.

"Well, Queen of the Night, you have added to the number of your slaves," he said, pushing Don aside and taking his place at my feet. "I thought I'd never get rid of the chap; he was too much fascinated by your beauty to move!" He laughed, as if triumphant—exultant, even. "I had to forgive his having startled you, Athena, his admiration was so whole-souled. You are the most beautiful of women always, but to-night you outshine yourself! When, just now, you stood, glorious in the moonlight, your white splendor was almost unearthly. Hair, gown, and jewels gleaming, a fitting setting for the gem-like purity of your perfect face! This great beast, charmed by your loveliness, crouching at your feet. God! What a picture you were—and are!"

I did not interrupt this highfalutin speech. There was never any use in trying to stop Philip. He only

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

began all over again directly. When he had exhausted his adjectives I asked the name of his friend.

"Randal's cousin, Dick Thorpe."

At this I experienced an odd pang in my heart, a strange sensation, and unpleasant. I was ashamed that the name of a man who had been rude to me could so affect me. I assured myself that it was a pang of mortified vanity—nothing more.

"It is half-past twelve," I said, "Sunday morning. They seem to be dancing at the stables yet."

"Randal has set the clock back. He can't get enough, the young idiot! Are you tired, Athena? Yes, I see you are; but give me one moment. Let me ask the question Dick Thorpe cut in two—a short question, but one that means—" He broke off with an odd laugh. "Curious how much courage it requires. Athena, my fair child"—speaking very gravely—"will you be——"

A piercing shriek rang out upon the tranquil night, followed by Madam's awful cry for help.

"The dogs! the dogs! Philip, Philip, save me!"

For an instant Philip was as if turned to stone, the words he would have spoken frozen on his lips; the next he was in Madam's room, and had caught her in his arms.

"Don't shoot!" she screamed, catching at his hands; "remember he is—" But Philip pressed her face against his breast, smothering her outcry.

"Go to your room, Athena," he commanded, "go, and close the door behind you."

As I obeyed I saw the dancers returning from their revels. The place had suddenly all grown sad. The ferns and flowers which decked the great hall so bravely were unwithered, yet it looked desolate, forlorn. Madam's birthnight fête—was over.

XVII

The favor I had asked of Madam was to be permitted to go to church the next morning. Since coming to Highgrove Hall she had never suggested my going, and had always seemed in special need of my services on Sunday. Her readiness to grant permission made me regret I had been too shy to do so earlier. I was excited as I made my toilet for church, resuming for the morning my own black bonnet and gown. I had not passed the gates since the rainy day when I had come to the Hall. It seemed more than a month ago. Madam could never be induced to leave the shelter of her high brick walls, although she liked driving, she said, and proved by her frequent visits to the stables her fondness for horses. Almost every day, her pockets filled with sugar, she was wheeled into the box-stall of her favorite, "Captain Kidd," Mr. Erranti's saddle-horse, a light chestnut of splendid appearance and most uncertain temper. I sometimes trembled to see her chair pushed close to his very active limbs, but he always controlled himself in her presence. A thoroughbred, he showed his breeding by his respect for the old lady. Often I longed to ride him. The putting down of my saddle-horse was the one deprivation that had caused me a tear when poverty came.

To my surprise I found Mr. Erranti on the veranda when I went to look for the carriage, evidently intending to accompany me to church. He

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

looked very staid and conventional, quite unlike my partner of the night before.

"Don't say I mayn't go, Athena," he said, smiling at my very visible astonishment. "Surely you won't throw cold water on my good intentions!"

I should have preferred going alone, but said I was pleased he wished to go. I did not say it nicely, white lies never slipping gracefully from my lips. The carriage, a Victoria with wheels picked out in yellow, swept up to the house, and we dashed away down the avenue. The men on the box wore yellow liveries, the harness was brass-mounted, Philip's gay taste showing everywhere. But the horses were perfect, going like the wind. I delighted in the rush through the warm, sweet-scented air, and sighed with relief as we dashed between the brick pillars of the gateway out into the broad white highroad beyond.

"Poor caged bird," said Philip; "she is glad to escape for a time from behind the bars! You shall have freedom to-day, Athena. I think you need it. Take to-day to rest, tired child, and forget your chain."

I thanked him, but said I might not leave Madam for so long.

"Not with her devoted son?" he asked, smiling. "I shall spend the afternoon with her myself. No"—as I would have remonstrated—"the matter is settled. Let me talk to you of something else. Did you know I had been brought up, like you, in Europe?"

He told me of leaving home when a lad of nine to go to Eton; from there, later, to Heidelberg for a year, then to Paris, finishing with a long stay in Italy, and after, for pleasure only, seeing many foreign lands.

"I came home when I was nineteen, and left again when I was twenty—in August, 1861."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Here I stupidly dropped on the floor of the carriage a piece of money I had held tight in my hand all the way. It was to put in the plate, and my pocket being hard to find I had carried it. My awkwardness stopped Philip's story, in which I was much interested. He picked up the money, but did not return it.

"You didn't know I was going," he said, an odd smile playing around his full lips, "so brought your mite? I shall confiscate," putting it in his pocket. Failing to see how his going affected my offering, I asked an explanation, but got none. He said I was an "absurdly generous child!"—which meant nothing. Glad of a pocket to keep the silver in, even if not my own, I let him harbor it.

We finally stopped before a handsome church in Droneton, and were ushered into a pew well in front. Scarcely were we seated before my feelings of devotion were suddenly put to flight by my catching sight of Richard Thorpe. He was behind us, on the opposite side of the aisle, between Randal and an upright little old gentleman, Mr. Beverley, I said to myself. The owner of Nemesis was soldierly looking. His long upper lip was hidden by a stiff white mustache, his stiff white hair was brushed up fiercely; from beneath stiff white eyebrows gleamed a pair of steely blue eyes. Yet he showered favors upon Randal St. John!

It was in turning to give Mr. Erranti a prayer-book—he carried none—that I caught this glimpse of Mr. Beverley and his nephews; but, though so brief a glance, it sufficed to show me that all three men were staring intently at Philip and me.

For a moment I felt conscious of their scrutiny, for a moment felt regret that Mr. Thorpe was no longer my friend. Then the service began, and I forgot them—forgot Mr. Thorpe's lost friendship,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

forgot everything save the joy of the hour. When the collection was taken up I was recalled to the petty vexations of life. I held out my hand to Philip for my silver, and he placed in it a bill for a large amount.

"I wish my own," I said, still holding out my hand. He leaned toward me till his cheek almost touched mine and, crushing my fingers together over the bill, murmured:

"This is your 'own,' foolish little Princess!"

My obstinate pride caused the church to lose the money. I let the bill fall on the seat between us. I would put nothing in the plate, then, and sat, erect and angry, unmindful of my prayers. This seemed to amuse Philip. After he had put in what he wished he took up the money dropped, and tucked it into his pocket, smiling as he did so. By the time the service was over I had softened. What was I, in Mr. Erranti's eyes, but the spoiled child of an old friend, whom he wished to help?

On our way down the aisle we came up with the Beverley party. Randal turned, greeting us in friendly fashion; Mr. Beverley marched straight ahead without looking round; Mr. Thorpe bowed stiffly. He had changed since I had last seen him. His face was thinner, less cheerful. Although I had intended to salute him formally, I was hurt by his assuming the same rôle.

"So you know Mr. Thorpe," said Philip, as we drove away; "but no, his bow was because of Randal's knowing us, I suppose."

I remained silent. Why need I correct this impression? My acquaintance with my aunt's lawyer was indeed a thing of the past.

Philip took off his hat, leaning back luxuriously against the soft cushions of the carriage. I stared at the noontide landscape, hot, drowsy, and peace-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ful, and Philip stared at me. I was neither drowsy nor peaceful, yet the sight of me seemed to soothe and please him as much as the fields and woods did me. Presently I broke the long silence which had fallen between us.

"I am sorry I was disagreeable about the money. I wish very much that you would try to understand how I feel, however."

"You are always agreeable to me, Athena, and to all the world, I should judge, from the way in which the crowd stare." He smiled lazily, and I thought what a pity his lips were too full. Otherwise, the dark face was perfect.

"I'm like the crowd," he went on, "so don't wonder at its rude staring. What I do sometimes wonder, is if you know how beautiful you are."

"Yes," I said, composedly, "just as you know that you are remarkably handsome. How can one help knowing? And what does it matter—after all!"

The languor vanished from Philip's voice and attitude. He sat erect, and looked eagerly at me.

"Do you really like my—well, think me not unpleasant looking, Athena?"

I smiled.

"As I just said, you are very remarkably handsome, Philip. How might anyone think otherwise? And—why should you care?"

"I care very much," he said, earnestly, "very much indeed. I feared, Athena, that to a lily-like creature like you I must be almost repulsively dark."

We had reached the Hall, and I was glad. I had no liking for the conversation, and little patience for what I considered ridiculous self-depreciation on his part. I capped his foolish remark with one equally so.

"Not so very dark," I said, stepping from the car-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

riage, "not quite a blackamoor!" — and passed swiftly on into the house and to my room.

Later, thinking I heard Julie, I opened my door on a crack to see. It was Philip, with Cray, and he was swearing so furiously in carefully lowered tones at his quiet valet that it almost took my breath away to hear him!

Word was brought me after luncheon that Madam would not need me until evening, and I was grateful to Philip. Deciding to spend the afternoon in the woods, where, not seeing the house, I might imagine myself free, I armed myself with a sunshade and a book and struck into the wood-path from which Mr. Thorpe had emerged. It ran along the top of the river-bank southward to Droneton. It was narrow, and as damp and overgrown as the avenue, from which it was separated by a dense thicket. Half a mile from the house it suddenly widened, making place for a rustic bench fronting the river, of which, because of trees and underbrush, one saw nothing. Here I had intended to sit and read, but it was too close and dismal. I followed the path for a half mile farther, where it ended abruptly, a green door in a high brick wall stopping farther progress. Close under the wall a little path led eastward, to the lodge, I supposed.

I had never explored so far before. Philip preferred my remaining near the house because of tramps. The railroad track below the bank was their highroad. Remembering this I was sorry I had come, wishing I had brought Don, and regretting that I had gone contrary to Philip's wishes when I owed my holiday to him. Still, I did not want to return. I opened the door, stepped through, and found myself in a broad meadow, flooded with sunshine. Around its edges grew a few trees, in

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

its centre a grove of maples sprang from the split masses of a tall rock. In past ages some farmer must have tried to rid himself of the gray giant by blasting, and failed. The maples had taken possession. I quickly scrambled up among them, and, seating myself near the edge, my back against a tree, opened my book, Celia Thaxter's poems.

I read of the little sandpiper, and could almost hear the waves upon the beach. I leaned my head against the friendly tree. I closed my eyes, the better to imagine myself on the beach—I fell asleep.

I was roused by a noise very near me—a rustling, a muffled tread, heavy breathing. I sat up and looked about me, then sprang to my feet in alarm. Close to the rock, staring wickedly, were thirteen cows! Thirteen! Where had they been when I entered the meadow? In hiding, probably, behind the trees on its edge. I was sure it was time to go home—I must have slept long—and I was a prisoner. Fortunately, I was safe on the rock. The cows could not climb it. Then I began to imagine disagreeable possibilities—the alarm my non-appearance might occasion; Madam's terror; Philip, with, perhaps, Randal—Randal would enjoy the excitement—scouring the woods, searching the river's edge, collaring innocent tramps;—and I—a ridiculous Andromeda, chained to a rock by vicious cows!

Stung into activity, I looked around for a weapon. There lay my sunshade—a large one. I picked it up, and, opening it suddenly at the cows, cried "Shoo!" at the top of my lungs. My effort was a failure as far as the cows were concerned. They gazed languidly and fearlessly at the umbrella, but a loud "Hallo!" as if in answer to my shout, came from the opposite direction. Looking toward the river I saw a man crossing the field. As he came

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

nearer, evidently thinking I had called him, I saw it was Mr. Thorpe.

I sat down instantly in my old place. I had not called, and should tell him so. Rather than ask him to drive away the cows, I would sit where I was all night. He advanced to the foot of the tiny precipice and looked up at me.

"Good-afternoon," I said, sedately. "It is warm, is it not?"

He took off his hat. "I thought you called."

"I only cried shoo to the cows."

"Is it possible you are afraid of them?"

His surprise at my cowardice displeased me. I was ashamed of my fear.

"I am," I said, haughtily; "and it is time for me to go home."

"If you will come down"—he spoke stiffly—"I will walk with you to the door in your wall."

"Thank you," I murmured, knowing I must accept.

As I got up the heel of my slipper caught in a crevice of the rock. In haste to be gone I tried to jerk it free quickly, with the result that it came out and off at the same time, and bouncing over the edge fell at Mr. Thorpe's feet. He picked it up and stood turning the aggravating high-heeled thing over and over in his hands, eying it strangely. It was part of the Erranti livery, of white kid and saucy-looking. Presently he sprang nimbly up the rock, and, kneeling, replaced it on my foot.

"It does not fit well," he said, in an odd voice. "Either the little shoe is too large—or the little foot too small!"

I remained silent.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked, as if we had just entered a room together. Wondering at myself I

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

complied, and he seated himself facing me, his back to the river.

"The view from here is very lovely," I said, feeling somebody must say something.

"Yes, very," but he did not turn his head to look at it, and spoke absently, as if he had scarcely heard. Absorbed, apparently, in contemplation of the rich growth of moss that spread a soft green carpet over the surface of the rock between us, he touched it gently with strong, well-shaped fingers, as if admiring its elasticity and thickness. At last, raising his keen blue eyes to mine, he said:

"Am I speaking to Miss Derohan—or to Miss Dean?"

Surprised, I did not answer at once. Then I said:

"Mrs. Spuyten thinks Athena Derohan too fine a name for my position in life. She has rechristened me Augusta Dean. Pray call me whichever best pleases you, Mr. Thorpe."

"And, if I am not asking too much, your position at Highgrove Hall?"

I was, somehow, glad that he had not questioned Randal. But why, I wondered, was he so stern and care-worn, as if suffering from some poignant anxiety?

"I am Madam Erranti's housekeeper and companion, Mr. Thorpe. She is very good to me. Last evening's gayety was because of her;—her birth-night fête. You noticed, perhaps, my ball gown and the jewels—her diamonds? She has been kind. I wished to please her, yet"—I could not help my voice quavering suddenly—"I am in mourning."

"This pretty white frock," he asked gently, but eagerly, "is worn to please her?"

"Yes," becoming confidential in spite of myself, "she is not very well, and black terrifies her."

His sombre look vanished. He leaned forward.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Miss Derohan" — speaking very earnestly —
"may I know why you refused to see me when I called?"

For answer I only stared at him.

"Does that look mean I'm not to know?"

I found my voice.

"They said you did not ask for me. Did you?"

He moved nearer, crushing the gently fingered moss.

"And the flowers I sent you?"—his voice had a ring of excitement—"the lilies-of-the-valley?"

"I saw your beautiful flowers. Mrs. Spuyten supposed you sent them to Eva. If they were meant for me, I thank you."

Mr. Thorpe's plain face became handsome, illumined by his sunny smile.

"I've been a fool," he cried, "and have suffered bitterly for my folly. How dared I believe you would forget anyone to whom you had promised your friendship! Will you shake hands, Miss Derohan, as token of forgiveness, and let me make a fresh start?"

I went through the ceremony gravely.

"Duped by a miserable old woman!" said Mr. Thorpe. "But I won't revile her—I'm too big an idiot to have the right. In such a jolly place as this"—stretching himself at my feet and looking up at me with happy smiling eyes—"with such a perfect view to enjoy, I don't mean to think about anything disagreeable."

I laughed. I was absurdly happy. I discovered that Mr. Thorpe was very like Percy Stewart—strong, good, whole-souled.

"I wish you'd tell me everything you've done, Miss Derohan, since I put you into that dirty cab half a lifetime ago."

After I had finished my story he took his turn, and

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

not till after six o'clock did I remember Madam. Then I started to my feet conscience-stricken. I had meant to spend that hour with her. As we crossed the meadow—the cows had disappeared—Mr. Thorpe gathered for me the few daisies left blooming.

"May I come with you?" he asked, when we reached the door in the wall. The little path looked gloomy indeed after the meadow.

"Weren't you on your way somewhere when you heard me shout?"

"Only walking off a fit of the blues."

"I am sorry you are not happy, Mr. Thorpe."

"I am now. To tell the truth, I was worrying about you."

"About me! Why, pray?"

He colored fiercely.

"Never mind why," he said. "I told you I'd been a fool. I hope you may never know how big a one. Now, may I come with you through this dark wood?"

"I shall be very glad if you will," I said, simply. "Mr. Erranti doesn't like me to walk here alone on account of tramps."

"I don't doubt he looks after you carefully," he said, dryly. "I'll give him that much credit."

"You don't like Mr. Erranti?"

"Naturally not, Miss Derohan."

So they had had a falling out! Yet Mr. Erranti had spoken of Mr. Thorpe good-naturedly.

"Let's sit down here and rest, Miss Derohan." We had arrived at the bench midway. "You must be tired."

I explained why I had not time.

"Then will you go for a row this evening? It's moonlight. The river will be lovely."

I explained that my time was no longer my own.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Will you go some other evening?"

"Do you expect to be here again, Mr. Thorpe?"
I was both surprised and pleased.

"Every Sunday. I shall spend my vacation with my uncle, too."

"You are fond of him?"

"Very. He's a kind old chap, and always makes me welcome. I mean to spend all my spare time with him in future—at the Towers, I mean."

We had reached the house. Julie, looking from Madam's window, spied us.

"Madame is in the garden with Monsieur," she cried, shrilly. "Will Mademoiselle go to her?"

I nodded. Mr. Thorpe declined to accompany me.

"May I hope to see you next Saturday?" he asked.

"I shall be very glad if you will call."

"Should you refuse to receive me, Miss Derohan, I sha'n't behave well. Past experience will lead me to strangle the butler and shout for you till you appear."

"Not this butler, please," I said, smiling, "for he is my friend."

Mr. Thorpe surveyed the bulky pile glooming above us with small favor.

"Well," he said, slowly, "the more friends the better, I should say, in this prison," and he reluctantly took his departure.

XVIII

I found Madam under the birch trees by the pool. On benches drawn on either side sat Philip and Randal. The old lady looked tired and sad, and a Sunday-afternoon-atmosphere, of quiet boredom, seemed to envelope the group. At sight of me Madam's face cleared.

"Athena!" she cried, "I have been weary without you! Ah, daisies! The pretty things. Come sit by me, close, close, and I will tell your fortune with one."

The men sprang to their feet, offering me a choice of seats. I chose Philip's bench. Randal's vanity was too easily fed.

"How cool and radiant you are, dear child," said Madam, looking wistfully at me as I gave her a daisy. "You have had a happy afternoon—all alone, *n'est-ce pas?*"

I said I had been happy. I did not tell her of my lack of loneliness. With Randal at my elbow I did not feel expansive. He did, however.

"Don't she look sweet?" he drawled, staring innocently. "But there's no use in my telling her so! She don't care for my compliments. Please, dear Madam, name that daisy 'Athena,' and try if she likes me a little."

Madam pursed up her lips, glancing doubtfully at me.

"Please do," urged Randal, "and then you can try Erranti's luck. We're both in the same boat, you know."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"It will take three daisies to try fairly," said Madam, who evidently had faith in the test. She had become very solemn. "Can you spare so many, Athena?"

"She can spare all," said Randal. "What does she want with common field-flowers? Come, my fortune, Madam!"

I tucked a few daisies into my belt, yielding the rest to Fate.

"I'm fearfully agitated," cried Randal, pretending to shiver.

"Un peu, beaucoup, passionnément, pas du tout," recited Madam, monotonously, and with each sentiment a leaf fell.

"Translate somebody, quick!" Randal whispered, hoarsely. "I don't understand, and my nerves are in an awful state!"

Madam, really excited, paid no heed. Her expression told me that if the daisy showed favor she would cheat to gain her way, and pull off two leaves at once, to do so.

"Un peu, beaucoup, passionnément, pas du tout"—Philip's rich sweet voice chimed in with his mother's—"meaning, a little, much, passionately, not at all!"

"A little what?" asked Randal, pretending to be stupid.

"A little love," said Philip, looking at me instead of at his friend. "Not so good as 'much,' but far better than 'not at all!' And who dare hope for—'passionately'?"

"Pas du tout?" cried out Madam, her sing-song stopping suddenly. *"Pas du tout!"*

She clapped her hands, laughing with delight. Then, fearing she had been rude, hung her head like a child, glancing sideways at Randal to note if he were angry.

He was displeased. He could not endure being

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

relegated to the background, though for me he cared nothing.

"One more trial—no, two more, Madam! It must be two out of three to win or lose," he cried.

Another daisy was stripped of its petals, with the same result as the first. The old lady's delight increased, an angry light gleamed in Randal's eyes.

"Now for Erranti's turn!" he said, irritably. "He looks very calm and satisfied, but I bet you the daisy'll knock the conquering hero out of him!"

"No, no," said Madam, quickly. "Philip does not believe in nonsense. I will try for Athena. She shall name her daisy softly, very softly, so that none may hear. Later I may know his name, *n'est-ce pas, petite?*"

I took the flower to do as she wished, when Philip laid his hand lightly on my arm.

"I name the daisy," he said, quietly. "Pray begin, *maman.*"

I was about to remonstrate when Randal laughed softly, as if in pleased anticipation of this remonstrance, and I kept silence.

"*Passionnément!*" said Madam, finishing her task. Philip placed another daisy in her hand.

"Once more, *maman.*"

The same answer—*passionnément!* Philip leaned back, smiling.

"I protest!" said Randal, crossly. "It's not fair to name it after Miss Dean without her leave! It's deuced mean, Erranti!"

"My dear boy, you are laboring under a mistake," said Philip, coolly. "I only did what I saw Miss Dean wouldn't do. I didn't name the daisy after her. I named it for a man, of course."

Randal thought Philip had paid him the compliment of calling the flower for him! His vanity was hugely tickled, and the spirit of teasing reawakened.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I'm going to be like the little acorn, Miss Dean! 'Little by little' I'll grow in your esteem. First 'not at all,' I'll end up 'passionately,' see if I don't! You'll be adoring me in no time! I won't remind you of past ill-treatment, so don't worry." He grinned broadly, showing nearly all the lining of his upper lip.

I thought both men silly and lacking in good taste. Madam, also uncomfortable, shut her eyes tight and ordered a return to the house.

In the evening, after nine o'clock, Philip came to her room. I was still there.

"*Maman*," he said, gently, "may I take Athena for a row? She has never been upon the river."

"You would atone, *méchant*, for the trick you played in the garden? To name the flower 'Randal!' That *vaurien* her suitor! Too bad, indeed! But she has been upon the river, Philip, as Randal should remember. Go, my child," turning to me. "Philip will take care of thee. Quick, Julie, my *crêpe de Chine* for Mademoiselle, and the white lace for her head, *vite, ma fille!*"

I did not wish to go, after refusing Mr. Thorpe; but this I might not explain, and I submitted in silence while being swathed in the shawl and scarf I did not need. Once outside, however, I thought to be free of the wraps at least, but Philip interposed.

"No, no, your arms and throat are bare, Athena, and the air of the river is chill."

It was a beautiful night. As we crossed the railroad track I could see it gleaming far into the distance, two long lines of silver thread. The grassy point, with boat-house and willows, the steep wooded banks on either hand, and the great stretch of river, were all bathed in a white splendor. Philip unlocked the boat-house door and stood aside for me to enter. A lighted lamp hung in its little corridor.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I hesitated. I thought of the dead man who had lain there.

"Foolish child, what do you fear?" said Philip. He took my hand and led me through to the steps beyond, where a boat lay ready. Another moment and we floated out upon the moonlit water.

"Are you glad you came, Athena?"

So he had noticed my reluctance!

"It was kind of you to bring me," I said; "but you and your mother are very good to me, always."

"Before my mother was ill she was always kind. Now she is sometimes a little thoughtless of others," he said, pulling the boat with long, smooth strokes northward along the shore. "I am glad you find her kind, for you are very sweet to her, Athena. You gave her great happiness last night. Wearing her diamonds pleased her very much. I know you disliked doing so—they have been little worn."

"Because of her illness, I suppose."

"No," said Philip, with sudden fierceness, "because of my father, who was a fiend incarnate. Ah! your beautiful eyes tell me you pity her, Athena! May I tell you her story here, upon the river, where no tattling eavesdroppers lurk to carry tales?"

"You are sure she would be willing?"

"Quite sure," he said, smiling kindly. "Your ever active conscience may be at rest, but please don't talk to her of the past—I want her to forget. She lost her parents when a mere child, and was brought up by her uncle, her guardian. His household was a gay one, and she led a happy life, among a host of young cousins and friends. My mother was not only bright and pretty but, unfortunately, an heiress as well. This was what attracted my father, who had squandered his own patrimony. He was handsome, well-born, agreeable, with a dashing manner that easily pleased the ro-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

mantic fancy of a girl of seventeen. She was only that when she first met him, poor child! At eighteen she came into her fortune. He waited until then to declare himself, and, when her guardian violently opposed the match, persuaded her to run away with him. Am I tiring you, Athena?"

I shook my head. I was absorbed.

"As you may imagine, her fortune soon followed his—he was a spendthrift, a scoundrel! Too poor to live in the gay city of her birth, he took my poor mother to a lonely plantation which was still his only because he could not sell it, having a life interest in it merely. Her life became hideous—but she never told, she was brave. She gave up all communication with relatives and friends—she would not have them know of her misery. For the slaves who worked the plantation she did what she could. Miserable, suffering creatures, slaves of a devil, they lived in hell!"

The silence that followed became oppressive. To break it I asked of the diamonds.

"Ah, yes," said Philip, "I was forgetting. My father was away often, carousing with his boon companions. Once, before leaving for one of these orgies, he demanded the diamonds. My mother refused them. There was a frightful scene. She thought he would kill her, but her blood was up, she would not yield. He rode away, vowing vengeance, swearing he would have them yet. When he returned he learned that they had been stolen by river thieves. He chose to be amused that his wife had been plundered! Had he guessed that she was the thief, and the diamonds safe in her possession, his sense of humor might have failed him."

He ceased speaking, brooding on the past. After a time he resumed the subject.

"My father died suddenly—a violent death. A

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

young man whom he had wronged shot him. My mother begged me to take her abroad, to begin life afresh, with a new name. Her husband's, a French name—he was of French descent—was hateful to her. I did as she wished. I have been able to give her luxuries. Until her illness she was comparatively happy. Now, strange fancies about the past torment her. Nightmare imaginings mingle with realities in her disordered brain. I am powerless to help her—it is very saddening.”

I admired his devotion.

“It must comfort you to feel that you have never failed her,” I said, gently.

A strange smile flitted across the handsome dark face.

“I owe her much,” he said, “more than I can ever repay.”

The moon shimmered on the water. The faint south breeze blew back my hair as we rowed against it homeward. Philip began to sing. When we reached the boat-house I was astonished to find we had been out two hours. It was after eleven. At the top of the bank, on the edge of the lawn, I stopped to look again at the river, a shield of silver.

“Sit down awhile,” said Philip, pointing to a bench beneath a fir-tree, “and enjoy the beauty of the night.”

“It is late, I must go in.”

“Not yet,” he insisted, “not until I give you my reason for wearying you with that sad story.”

“But you did not weary me,” and to prove this I moved to the bench and sat down. Philip remained standing.

“Had you been Augusta Dean,” he said, slowly, looking down at me steadfastly, “I should not have told you my mother's history. If I had not been interrupted last night by Thorpe and my mother I

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

should, after you had answered my question, have told you then. Since, I have decided that it was due you to let you know first that—I am a nameless man.”

I sat quite still, as though turned to stone. I knew what was coming, and my heart died within me.

“You are poor, Athena”—he spoke in low measured tones—“and I am very rich. I can give you everything you desire. I regret bitterly that I can’t offer you an old and honorable name, like your own, my Princess. Oh, Athena, Athena,” he cried, suddenly, giving rein to his passion, “turn your great starry eyes from the cold river and look at me, your lover! Tell me, my darling, that you will be my wife.” He seized my hands in his, covering them with kisses. I tried in vain to free them. “You will marry me, sweetheart?” he pleaded, his splendid eyes a-light, his face white beneath its tan in the moon’s rays.

“No,” I said, coldly. “No. I thank you, but I can never be your wife.”

I was unreasonably angry. The old feeling of repulsion swept over me anew, and I strove to draw my hands from his. Yet I knew I had no right to resent his behavior. He was not to blame for asking me to be his wife, nor might he be expected to realize that his words meant my dismissal. I could no longer remain at the Hall. Where should I go? As these thoughts crowded through my mind, jostling each other, Philip, regaining his composure, released my hands and sat down beside me.

“Let us talk the matter over quietly,” he said. “You will at least do me the justice of hearing me out?”

I bowed. That was only fair.

“Tell me first why you refuse me, Athena?”

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Because I don't love you."

He laughed. "My dearest child, I haven't asked you to."

I stared at him, bewildered.

"I never thought you loved me, Athena. I am not such a conceited fool. I only ask you to be my wife. If, by and by, you can give me a little affection—but that will come! Listen. You shall live where you like, and as you like; travel, or remain at home, as you please. You shall have your own way in everything, and be served and tended like a little queen. All I ask is the right to be near you. Marry me, *ma bien-aimée*, and I swear you shall be happy."

"No, no," I repeated, "it cannot be. I will go away. You will forget me and this idle fancy."

I believed what I said. That Mr. Erranti's feeling was but a passing fancy for a pretty face. I thought, in my youthful ignorance, that the matter lay entirely in my hands, that I was mistress of the situation. My name was Athena, but I lacked wisdom greatly.

"Nonsense!" said Philip. "I sha'n't permit you to leave us! Would you punish my mother for my fault, Athena? I know you better. Forget what I have said, since it displeases you, and everything shall be as it was before."

"That cannot be," I said, sadly, "for then I did not know."

"You did not know that I loved you?" Philip spoke incredulously. "You can't have been so blind, child! God knows I have been at no pains to hide my feelings!" He laughed, a short, hard laugh.

I lost patience.

"Why, only this afternoon," I cried, indignantly, "you named my daisy for Randal St. John! Madam thought so—and he was sure!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I'm not responsible for the vain imaginings of a foolish boy," said Philip, composedly. "I was sure that you knew the daisy spoke for me. It did—and but too truly."

"I wish to go home," I said, imperiously. "I have remained here too long already."

I rose and walked toward the house. In that last hour the relations between us had changed. With my father's friend, a man of twice my age, I had needed no chaperon. After his declaration the conditions were altered. I had grown up without guidance or knowledge of social laws, but instinct told me I should hasten home. At the foot of the staircase Philip stopped me.

"If you leave," he said, in low tones, "I swear I will follow you—should you fly to the uttermost end of the earth! If you are kind, and remain, I promise not to worry you. All shall be as before I spoke to-night."

"I will stay till the last of the month," I said, and ran upstairs.

I really had to stay—I had no money.

XIX

Philip kept his promise. He did not "worry me"; but since I knew of what he thought when he brought me a flower, when he sang to me, or watched me, busy with my embroidery at Madam's side, I was no longer quite at ease save during his absence from the Hall. Still, I believed he would soon cease to care for me, and strove myself to forget what he had wished.

That week a great "green" table—a gaming-table—arrived, and was put into the drawing-room, that Mr. Erranti's guests might enjoy "*rouge-et-noir*." A large party of men were coming for Sunday. The gardener's cottage had been garnished and turned into bachelor quarters. Highgrove Hall could not shelter so many.

At the stables there had been a new arrival also, a beautiful mare, bought for me. Madam had decided that I was too closely confined to the Hall. The mare had been purchased, a riding-habit ordered, and I was to accompany Philip in his morning rides before breakfast. I objected strenuously, but in vain. Madam swept away all opposition, and I gave way. As riding is my passion, I suppose there was a traitor in the camp.

"Larry"—the groom—"shall always go with you when Philip is away," said Madam, "as of course you are to ride every day whether he is at home or not. It is for your health. Larry must follow, how-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ever, in any case. Outside the gate you are not our little girl, but a young lady—and must be properly attended.”

In all the arrangements I recognized Philip's hand; even Madam's words were prompted by him. Larry's presence was meant to reassure me, as it did. We rode every morning from six till half-past seven, breakfasting at eight, and explored the country for miles around. Few were abroad at that early hour. The whole world, with the freshness of the morning glorifying it, belonged to us. Philip was kind and courteous, a friendly companion, nothing more. After ten days had slipped away, convinced that he had forgotten his folly, I regained confidence. I was again at my ease when alone with him. What was past was past, and I found the present very absorbing.

Mr. Thorpe had reappeared at the end of the week, and Madam was pleased with him. “He is not so amusing as his cousin, the *vaurien*,” she pronounced, after his first call of ceremony; “but to be amusing is not everything! Thou art not amusing, my Athena. I sometimes wonder that I am never wearied by thy lack of conversation. Often thou art silent for hours, yet not dull. The great calm of thy nature gives repose—for I know, though so quiet, thou art ever ready. Young Thorpe is strong. But for his smile he would be ugly—yet I like him much, much, much!”

She insisted that I should accept his invitations to go out on the river after breakfast, when I was free, and made time for me to walk with him on Sunday afternoons. But she did not allow me to drive with him, and told me not to mention my morning rides.

“Philip might be displeased,” she said. “He sees many people daily. The early ride rests him—alone with a silent child.”

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Mr. Thorpe would not wish to join us, Madam."

"I think differently," said Madam, screwing up her eyes and wagging her head. "I know young men, *ma chère!* Yes, yes, I know young men!"

So I held my peace. Mr. Thorpe must know all our habits, I thought, for he had begun to haunt the Hall. Claude with difficulty repressed a grin when he announced him. The morning rides continued without his asking to be one of the party, or, indeed, ever alluding to them. My pleasure in them was very great. I had become fond of the beautiful mare, Czarina, a high-spirited yet gentle creature, with many virtues. Her one fault was obstinacy about jumping. She hated it, and sometimes refused a fence for a half-hour before yielding to coaxing. Captain Kidd flew over anything and everything Philip put him at, like a bird—to my aggravation. I thought his readiness added to the mare's obstinacy.

When I had ridden her for a month she knew and loved me well enough to do my bidding as a general thing, with only occasional relapses. One morning when one of these had occurred and I had, by determined gentleness, gained my point, Philip asked me if I never gave up.

"Very seldom."

"Then why go to work so quietly with the mare?" he said. "Why not teach her quickly with whip and spur?"

"How little you know her!" I exclaimed. "Try to force her and you would gain nothing. She would die sooner than give up. I sympathize with her, and she knows it,"—patting the glossy neck—such a rich dark bay—fondly.

"This is the sixteenth," said Philip, absently.

"The middle of August," I added, thinking that Dick Thorpe's vacation began in two weeks.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"It is my birthday."

"I am sorry I did not know, Philip," I said, with real regret. "Now I have only my best wishes to offer!"

"Meaning you would otherwise have made me something?"

"Yes."

"Thank you just the same, Athena. But I want no gifts on my birthday. I hate it, and generally let it pass without mention. I should like a present on Christmas very much."

"What, for instance?"

"Anything you were kind enough to make."

"You don't wear slippers," I said, musingly. "Pocket pincushions are such ugly little things. You never smoke anything but cigars, so a tobacco pouch would be useless. As for embroidering initials on handkerchiefs—why, you've millions already! Never mind, you shall have something, Philip!"

"I think, on second thoughts, I'd like a birthday treat, Athena. Will you go now with me to see the little glen I told you of yesterday?"

I acquiesced at once, glad to celebrate the day. The little glen proved charming. To reach it we rode through lanes and across fields, and at last, leaving the horses with Larry, were obliged to scramble up its narrow entrance on foot. After pushing through a dense growth of trees and underbrush we came upon a rocky basin, filled to the brim with the water of a little cascade that trilled over the cliff beetling above. The tall trees arching their branches over the water made it look black and mysterious. I was enchanted with the wildness of the place.

Flinging hat, gloves, and whip on the mossy bank behind me I knelt close to the water's edge and drank from a cup made of my hands.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Delicious," I said, looking up at Philip. "Cold, with the sparkle of champagne!"

"You make me feel a second Dives," he said, plaintively. "It's like the child's riddle, 'Water, water, everywhere! Yet not a drop to drink!'"

"Why not do as I?"—holding out my dripping fingers.

"I can't! The water runs up my sleeves and makes my cuffs soggy, but never into my mouth. I shall have to go thirsty unless you—but no, it would be impertinent to ask."

I am sometimes unfortunately prosaic.

"Since you are stupid about it," I said, thoughtlessly, "kneel down and I'll give you a drink."

He knelt quickly beside me and drank once, twice, thrice. He was very thirsty indeed, but at last had finished.

"I wish it were the water of Lethe," he said, gloomily, as we rose to our feet.

"You wish to forget the past?"

"Yes, all of it! Every year, every month, every day!"

I was sorry for him. His had been a hard life.

"Where is your handkerchief?" he asked, suddenly.

"In my saddle-pocket," I said, holding my dripping fingers well away from my habit. "Please carry my things for me till I can get it." I nodded toward my hat and gloves.

"Use mine," he said, offering it me.

I accepted gladly. I was in no hurry to leave the glen, which fascinated me, and I dried each finger very slowly. Looking up at Philip to comment upon the convenience of so large a handkerchief I saw an expression in his eyes that startled me back into silence. The next instant his arms were around me, and I felt his lips upon my face and

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

hair. I could not move or speak, so closely did he hold me, so heavy was the rain of kisses. Indeed, my anger was beyond words. When he released me I dropped the handkerchief, gathered up my belongings, and motioned him to let me pass.

"My birthday treat!" he said, a triumphant smile on his handsome, dark face.

I hurried back to the horses. I allowed him to mount me, as usual, because of Larry; but I did not speak during the ride home, and swung myself from the saddle before he could get to my side, when we reached the Hall. He overtook me at the staircase.

"I have sinned past forgiveness?" he asked.

"I shall not ride again."

He stood aside, and I went to my room.

XX

For nearly two weeks after this episode Philip tapped gently at my door each morning, saying:

"The horses are ready, Athena; will you come?"

And each day I made the same reply:

"I shall not ride again."

He then went alone, dropping the subject until the next morning, when the same formula would be repeated. Otherwise all went on as quietly as before. To my surprise and relief, Madam questioned me little on the subject.

"When thou art rested thou wilt ride again, *ma chère*," she said several times, looking at me wistfully. "Philip is lonely without his young companion."

At the end of ten days he lost patience. One morning he stopped me on my way to the garden.

"Athena," he said, "if you are really determined not to ride again I shall sell the mare."

"Very well."

I spoke coldly, but my heart sank. Though I did not ride my pretty Czarina I saw her every day. I should miss her sadly—if I remained at the Hall. I had almost resolved to leave—almost! Madam's happiness had begun to depend upon my companionship. I had become attached to her, and, for another reason, I was not anxious to be gone.

"I beg your pardon, my child, for my violence. Please forgive me, Athena, and ride with me again."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"No."

"Then I sell the mare."

"Very well."

"It is not very well but very ill, and you know it, Athena! But you are as cold, as stern, as unforgiving as Pallas Athena herself! I am a fool to try to soften marble."

He turned and left me, but before I reached the garden gate he was again at my side.

"I am going to town, and I shall tell all the men I see that Czarina is for sale. Several want her already. If, however," speaking slowly and impressively, "you should in the meanwhile change your mind, even at the eleventh hour, tell Burke and the mare is yours." Burke was the head coachman and my friend.

I bowed.

"You quite understand, Athena?"

I thought I did.

"Even if a purchaser comes to see the mare and decides to buy, the casting vote is still yours. And, if you wish to keep her—well, you become the owner of Czarina."

He was gone; I, left to regret that I was the arbiter of the mare's fate. I tormented myself by imagining her in the hands of a cruel master, then laughed at my fears. So valuable a creature would be well treated for money's sake. When Madam and I paid our daily visit to the horses Czarina had never looked more lovely, nor shown more affection, I thought. She leaned her gentle head against my shoulder before searching in my pocket for her lump of sugar. Why had Philip made parting with her a necessity? Burke, a solemn person, eyed me reproachfully, I thought.

Three days passed. On the morning of the fourth I descended to the kitchen. Norah was to teach me

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

how to make a wonderful cake;—a great favor, as she was loath to part with the secrets of her art.

"It is Friday, Norah," I said, gayly. "Shall I have any luck, do you think?"

"I'm not shuperstitious meself," said Norah, loftily. "Friday's as good as another, I do be thinkin'."

"To-morrow is the first of September," I said.

"Yes," sighing. "Summer's gone, sure enough, Miss Dean. I think, maybe, we'll make wan patty-pan, or tree or four. Some of your friends will be glad an' proud to taste this same!" She looked slyly at me. "We won't be after puttin' all our eggs in wan basket!"

I knew of whom Norah was thinking. Mr. Thorpe's vacation began that night.

"It's a queer thing, Miss Dean," she went on, as she bustled about making preparations for our great work, "that me own cake don't never please me! It's me mother's that suits. Sometimes I feel I must have a bit,—and then I can't seem to get me fill! I remember last March whin the Boss give me a couple of days off to visit me parints, I ate so much me mother thought I'd bust wid the cake I put in me!" She laughed. "Me parints live further up the river—a bit back in the country, forninst the Highlands, as they mountains do be called. 'Tis on a bit side-track of a railroad, after you quit the New York train, not far from the flag-station in the fields. 'Lend me the loan of your lantern,' I says to the station-master, 'an' I'll go cross-fields home.' I'd on me black silk, me velvit cape, an' me Sunday hat fine with feathers, and them barbed-wire finces giv' me some tall trouble, Miss Dean, but the ploughed field forninst the house was worst! I'd on me new kid boots; they was snug in the fit of them, an' me feet that tinder! First wan foot sunk in, then t'other, an' on I wint like an old cow in a

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

bog till I reached me parints' door! Murphy, he barked. 'Be quiet, there, ye noisy spalpeen!' says me mother—an' in I wint. 'Glory be! 'Tis Norah hersilf!' says my mother. 'For the love of hivin,' says I, 'giv' me some cake,' afore she'd finished letting the great screech out of her from surprise at the sight of——"

Norah stopped speaking, her face grew scarlet, she contorted her features into a horrible grimace, darting out her tongue repeatedly. My back was toward the window that she faced. Turning quickly, I caught a glimpse of a man's back disappearing along the path outside.

"Who was it, Norah?"

"That dirty, black-faced little Dutchman!" she cried, angrily; "him with the woolly head! I'll teach him to come sassin' me in me own kitchen!"

From which I knew that Mr. Von Schlange had arrived.

"What can he want when Mr. Erranti is away?"

"It's little good the like of him is afther I'll go bail," said the indignant cook. "Kissin' his hand at dacent girls!"

Then we became absorbed in our work. Before an hour was over we were interrupted by the hasty entrance of Claude and Larry. They came from the pantry, where the former had evidently been at work, as he was enveloped in his huge, be-stringed apron. Larry had a curry-comb in his hand. Claude's manner, as good as a weathercock in showing from what quarter the wind blew, foretold a storm. His sallow face was several shades paler than usual, his big eyes dilated, his eyebrows raised in indignant protest, while Larry, red-faced and angry, showed his mental disturbance by tightly clenched fists.

"Where's your manners?" cried Norah, as they

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

tumbled into the kitchen without ceremony. "Don't you see Miss Dean?"

"For the Land's sake, Norah, be quiet," wailed Claude, "and let Larry speak! It's Miss Dean we're after. If she won't put her foot down poor Rina's as good as dead!" He wrung his long hands wildly.

"Is the mare ill, Larry?" I asked.

"It's this, Miss Athayna—the Dutchman's killin' her."

"The Dutchman?"—then, remembering Norah's grimace and the retreating figure—"Mr. Von Schlange? Speak out, Larry! What has he to do with Czarina?"

Without being conscious of my action I untied my big cooking-apron and tossed it to Norah.

"Then he's thrying to make her jump, the damned villain," cried poor Larry, forgetting my presence in his anger. "He's tore her wid his spurs till she's bloody, an' he's flogged her till she's nigh sinkin' under him; but the blessid craythure won't give in!" Then, in tones of triumphant pride, "Sure, she'll die afore she'll jump anythin' for anywan but you, Miss, dear—an' that's God's truth!"

I started on a run for the stables, knowing there was no time to lose. Larry and Claude strove to keep up with me in vain. Back of the stables was a large paddock, where the horses were sometimes turned out. In the centre was a jumping-bar, used by the grooms for training purposes, and by the men who came to the house for practice. A five-barred gate gave entrance to the paddock, and there I found Burke, surrounded by a group of stable-boys and gardeners, angrily watching what he was powerless to stop. As I ran up the others stood aside, but Burke, touching his cap, said, eagerly:

"Thank you for coming so quick, Miss Dean. Will you give the word for me to speak?"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I avoided meeting his entreating eyes. I stepped forward and looked over the gate.

Before the jumping-bar stood Czarina, so motionless, so rigid, her beautiful limbs might have been made of bronze. But no bronze horse was ever so covered with froth and lather, nor showed such ugly streaks of red upon its sides.

Von Schlange's face was livid, blotched here and there with purple. His teeth were set, his brows drawn in an ugly scowl, his eyes burning. In his terrible passion, beside himself with rage, he had reached the point of not caring what happened to the mare so long as he broke her will.

And I—what should I do? The mare or I must suffer, her will or mine be broken. Which should it be? In that one moment I lived an eternity; then, the man on Czarina braced himself for another effort——

Deep, deep, dug the cruel spurs into her tender sides. Down came the heavy riding-crop with fearful force. She did not move. I looked at Burke.

"I keep the mare. Act quickly."

No need for this command! Before the words were out of my mouth he was through the gate—Larry close behind him—and at Von Schlange's side. Larry, catching Czarina's bridle, gently stroked her lovely, terrified face, while Burke, a low-voiced man, said a few words to Von Schlange. I could not hear what he said, but in answer came a shower of curses, and, upon repeating his demand, Von Schlange lifted his riding-whip and struck violently at Burke's upturned face. Burke caught the whip, dropped it, then, seizing Von Schlange by the arms, wrenched him from the saddle. The mare, freed from her burden, walked quietly by Larry's side toward the gate.

My poor Czarina! Trembling in every limb,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

with drooping crest and bloodshot eyes, covered with heavy welts, with blood and foam, she still had a gentle welcome for her mistress. I went with her into her stall; she dropped her tired head upon my shoulder, sighing heavily. She was at rest—but I broke down. I flung my arms around her neck, and the great sobs that I could not repress tore and rent me. I do not cry often, nor easily. I had made a great sacrifice. I had been conquered—I, Athena Derohan, and I sobbed aloud.

Larry, coming in with a basin of water and a sponge to wash off the marks of Von Schlange's violence, was frightened by my emotion.

"Miss Athayna, me darlin' young lady," he cried, "for the love of hivin', an' us all, don't take on so! Sure the mare's not hurt a mite for good an' all! She'll be as aisy as iver the morn, an' as right an' tight as a bird for the ridin'!"

I walked to the door and stood looking out, trying to control myself. Through the gate came Von Schlange, attended by Burke. The little crowd of men who had been spectators of the scene had disappeared. Only Claude remained.

Von Schlange's puffy face was flushed and angry. I heard him say to Burke as they drew near:

"The mare's mine, I tell you, and I mean to have her! I'll report your damned impertinence, curse you! You'll repent this morning's work, I promise you. I want to be driven to the station. Make haste, damn you, and get a trap ready."

He glanced up and saw me. As if struck by my presence there, in the door of the mare's box-stall, he turned upon Burke and asked a question. I saw Burke answered very reluctantly. Von Schlange burst into a harsh, jarring laugh, and advanced toward me, making a low, sweeping bow as he came. He looked wicked, as if about to say something un-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

pleasant. Burke and Claude evidently thought the same, for the latter hastened to put himself in the way, asking if Mr. Von Schlange would lunch before he left.

"No, damn you!" was the brutal retort. "Get out of my road, till I speak to that meddling Madam yonder! I'd not have come on this fool's errand if I'd remembered how tight Erranti was tied to the apron-strings of his—" But he did not finish his sentence.

At the first mention of me Burke had paled and clenched his fists, but I hardly had time to notice him, Claude's behavior became so remarkable. At the words "meddling Madam" he doubled up his fists and whirled his arms about like a windmill gone mad. A child might have seen that he did not know how to fight, so I was the more startled when one of his fists came into violent contact with Von Schlange's nose, causing instant and disastrous results. Terror-stricken at what he had done, paling at the sight of the blood, he stood rooted to the spot, staring at his disabled enemy, who, cursing more violently than before, fumbled blindly for his handkerchief.

"Served him right!" shouted the usually quiet Burke, beside himself with excitement. "P'raps now you'll keep a civil tongue in your head!"—turning to Von Schlange. "But don't on any account if you'd rather not, sir, for I'd like nothing better than to punch the life out o' you at once myself, sir!"

"For the Land's sake," cried Claude, finding his voice, "come to the house and wash up before you go! You need a clean shirt, and the Boss will wish you should take one of his. Ain't you awful, swearin' like that! I should think you'd be ashamed! Oh, you needn't look black at me, you needn't! I'm

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

a free American, I am, and I won't take no sass from no nasty little Dutchman, you just better guess!" Then, with an hysterical giggle: "But I've drawn enough blood for one day, I hope!"

Mr. Von Schlange, yielding to necessity, followed him to the Hall. Burke came to me.

"That man's going straight to town to see Mr. Erranti, Miss Dean," he said. "If he gets there before the Boss knows your wishes he'll have the mare."

I was silent, looking to him for advice.

"If you'll just send a telegram, Miss Dean, I'll see that the Dutchman misses his train, and Mr. Erranti'll be sure to get it before he arrives."

I was forced to acquiesce, and Burke brought a telegraph blank so quickly I knew it had been at hand since Von Schlange's coming. I wrote this message:

"I keep the mare—and ride to-morrow.

"ATHENA."

Larry, mounted upon Captain Kidd, rode swiftly away with it. The die was cast.

I went to the house, to Madam's room, where I should have been earlier. She cried out at sight of me. I suppose I did look badly.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed. "What has happened? Thy face is terrible! White, drawn, awful—a Medusa face!"

She covered her own face with her hands, and peeped at me through her fingers. I tried to smile, to smooth out my rigid features.

"Nothing that need alarm you has happened, dear Madam," I said. "Czarina is not quite well; but Larry says she will be by to-morrow."

The volatile old lady took her hands from her face to smile at me.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Pretty Czarina!" she cried. "I know what has happened. Thou didst not ride, and restless Czarina has hurt herself jumping about her stall! No secrets from me, Athena." She laughed in triumph. "No, no, I find them out! A bird tells me—so always confide in me, *ma chérie*, best first as last! The riding, Athena? That soon begins again?"

"To-morrow morning."

Madam was pleased.

I thought Philip would be triumphant. I dreaded meeting him. When I left my room just before dinner I found him waiting for me in the upper hall. He was looking from the great end window, but hearing my door open came to meet me. His face expressed no exultation over my defeat, but much sadness.

"Don't speak to me, Athena," he said. "I don't deserve you should. I've behaved like a brute! I'm sick with shame! The moment I'd given that little beast permission to try the mare I regretted it. I was on the point of starting home a dozen times to-day to cancel the agreement—I wish to God I had!" He broke off, to pace up and down the hall; then, stopping before me, recommenced his self-reproach. "All day long your father's sad face has come between me and my work, Athena. 'I was your friend,' it said, 'yet how do you treat my child? Yes, how? By making her suffer for my fault! One day, Athena, he came to my office quite worn out. I knew he had not lunched, that he needed food, but dared not offer to get him some till I thought to pretend I, too, was hungry. When the meal was served, absorbed in his conversation—how well he talked, Athena—I forgot to eat, and he found me out. I shall never forget the reproach in his eyes as he said, 'I'm not an object of charity, Erranti.' Yet—he forgave me. Athena, you shall not

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ride again. I won't have you made miserable. The mare is yours—there, don't say no, child. For God's sake let me at least try to atone!"

Philip knew me well. Because of his kindness to my father I forced myself to speak gently when I would have kept silence, to attempt a renewal of friendship when I wished to turn away.

"Let us try to forget," I said, "since we may not blot out the past. I will ride again with you tomorrow morning, Philip."

"God bless you, my little Athena!"

XXI

When there were guests at the Hall Philip never asked me to preside at his table; but one afternoon during the second week in September he sent a note begging me to appear at dinner that evening. I was surprised, because two Englishmen had come from town with him, and a crowd of men were expected later. It was Friday—Philip rarely passed a Sunday alone. I did not dream of refusing, thinking he had some sensible reason for departing from his usual custom. I was a dull girl.

Julie came to help me dress. Madam always sent her on gala occasions, taking an odd pride in my looking my best when anyone was to see me. I hastened to choose my gown before Julie appeared—I had so many: more frocks, jackets, cloaks, and hats than I could wear! Madam was never weary planning new toilets. Her one grief was that I might not wear colors, but her ingenuity in obtaining so great a variety in white stuffs was marvellous.

"Juste ciel!" shrieked Julie, as entering she spied the muslin I had thrown upon the bed. "That simple batiste! Surely Mademoiselle will not wear a morning toilette to dine? What will Monsieur say?"

She ran to an armoire, took down several dresses made of rich stuffs, and spread them upon the lounge before me.

"One of these, Mademoiselle, I beg, I implore!" I did not care to be gowned like a princess.

"The corsage of the muslin is cut square, Julie,"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I insisted, "and the sleeves are flowing, so it will do very well for a dinner-gown. I am sure the lace trimming is exquisite. What more would you have?"

"Mademoiselle is ever the most obstinate," she grumbled sulkily, as she wove my hair into an intricate knot low on my neck. "As a child it was the same! 'I do not wish,' and all was at an end. And these two aristocrats—the English milords—with whom Mademoiselle is to dine? And Monsieur, who is so proud of Mademoiselle's beauty? A muslin! *Mon Dieu*, I shall be blamed!"

"Nonsense, Julie," I said, tired of her discontent, "you know well that rich brocades and satins are for married women, not for *jeunes demoiselles*."

I did not care to add that they were unsuitable for young persons filling my position, but that was what I thought.

"*Jeunes demoiselles!*" cried the Frenchwoman, her hard eyes meeting mine in the tall mirror before which I sat. "But with Mademoiselle the case is different! I am ready to say *Madame* whenever she so orders."

I looked at her steadily, trying to fathom her meaning, but could not. She did not meet my eyes again, and, my hair being done, fetched the despised muslin and helped me dress in silence. I pondered upon her strange speech till I began to suspect that something unpleasant was hidden in it. My toilet finished, I sat down to wait till I should be summoned to dinner, not caring to go down before.

"Mademoiselle is very beautiful to-night," said Julie, as she was about to leave the room. "I hope she may enjoy the evening."

Her voice and manner were apologetic. I decided she had intended to be unpleasant before.

"What do you mean, Julie, by offering to call me Madame?"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I spoke suddenly, and she looked startled; but a gleam of malicious amusement leapt into her eyes as she said:

"Oh, nothing, Mademoiselle; only I like to please."

"I don't understand," I persisted; "pray explain."

"I thought Mademoiselle might prefer," was the bewildering answer. "Some do."

I could not comprehend what she meant, nor account for the strange anger which suddenly took possession of me, nor understand why I instantly said, haughtily:

"Perhaps Mr. Erranti may be able to solve your riddle—since you are unwilling to explain."

Before I had finished speaking, Julie, the cold, hard Julie, had fallen on her knees at my feet, and was begging me to spare her.

"For the love of God," she entreated, "do not speak to Monsieur! Don't complain of me, *chère Mademoiselle*! I meant nothing, nothing—my poor head—crazy with fever heat—it burns—I know not what I say! Have pity, Mademoiselle!"

My anger vanished. Since she was ill, whatever impertinence she might have intended meant nothing. She might not show fretfulness toward Madam, so had vented her discomfort in ill-temper with me.

"There, there," I said, soothingly, "say no more about it. I will stay with Madam after dinner while you rest. You are over-done, Julie."

"And Monsieur?" she whispered, piteously. "Mademoiselle will say nothing?"

"Not a word. Why do you fear him?"

"He is so cruel."

She shuddered as she spoke. I was the more bewildered.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Then why do you stay here, Julie?"

She rose slowly to her feet. She was white and shaken.

"Because I must," she said, slowly, and went instantly from the room, as Claude appeared to announce dinner.

Philip was waiting for me at the foot of the staircase. He gave me his arm and led me to the library, where his two guests, Lord Walkington and Sir Frederic Goe, were talking with Randal St. John. Randal was always at the Hall. Lord Walkington was agreeable and handsome, Sir Frederic very good-natured. They were seated on either side of me at dinner, Randal being on Philip's right hand. I was not obliged to keep the ball of conversation rolling—the men did the talking. Philip was the only exception. He held up his end well when necessary, but otherwise preferred to be a listener.

Lord Walkington and Sir Frederic had travelled much; they were deeply interested in the "States" and in our ways. They discussed every subject of interest in our country, and I listened, anxious to learn. When dessert was served the South and the negro question were introduced. Sir Frederic asked many questions, among others why the negro was so much more looked down upon in America than in England.

"With us," he said, "a man wouldn't be thought much the worse for a touch of the tar brush, as it's called, but I understand it is different here. I am told that no matter how well-educated or wealthy a man might be, no white woman in the 'States' would marry him if he had but one drop of negro blood in his veins. Is that true?"

"Do you mean a white woman or a white lady?" asked Randal.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"A lady, of course," was the answer.

Remembering Miss Schwarz, in "Vanity Fair," I wondered if Sir Frederic, black-haired and swarthy, had himself a touch of the "brush" alluded to.

"Well," said Randal, "you see, the man you are imagining would not, could not, be a gentleman out and out, because his mother would not be a lady!"

"You mean she would have been a mulatto—mulattress—quadroon—octoroon—I'm not familiar with the terms. Of course, I quite understand that, also"—waving his hand cheerfully—"that the man in question, equally, of course, would be illegitimate. Still, let us say his father had had him educated, given him a fine start in life, let us suppose even given him the right to use his name. Now, as I understand it—setting the so-called stain of illegitimacy on one side—no American lady would consent to marry such a man simply because of those few drops of negro blood—not even if he looked as white as she!"

Randal, amused, smiled at me.

"Why don't you ask Miss Dean?" he drawled. "She's an American girl. On that subject I guess they all think alike."

I did not thank Randal for dragging me into this disagreeable conversation. I knew Philip, too, found the subject little to his taste, and felt it might better have taken place in my absence. He had not spoken, but amused himself twisting his glass, brimmed high with Burgundy, around and around by its slender stem, watching the play of light through the big, red bubble and the curious shadow of a stain thrown on the white damask beneath. At Randal's words he broke his long silence.

"Miss Dean," he said, coldly and slowly, "was born and brought up in a foreign land. She can-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

not be expected to understand the prejudices of her countrywomen."

"Don't you believe him, Sir Frederic," cried Randal. "It makes no sort of difference where she was born and bred! It's in the blood. They all have the same code. You wouldn't marry a chap with darky blood in him, Miss Dean, would you?"

I shook my head.

"Not if he were an Adonis—white as marble, wise as Solon, and rich as Croesus?"

"No."

"There! What did I tell you, Sir Frederic!"

Sir Frederic was not satisfied.

"Pardon me, Miss Dean, for more questions—but this interests me greatly. Say you met such a man, loved him, engaged yourself to him, all without knowing his secret, what then?"

"I should break the engagement—and my heart!" I said lightly, rising from table, since dessert was over, and Lord Walkington looked impatient for his cigar. I was anxious to escape.

"One moment," cried Sir Frederic, "just one more question before you go! Suppose you found out after marriage—ah! answer seriously, please, Miss Dean, I really wish to know."

"Seriously, then," I said, gravely, "if such an awful fate were to be mine——"

I got no further, for at that moment the stem of the glass Philip was still twisting snapped off short, and the wine not only inundated the tablecloth but was flung in great splashes upon Randal's shirt-front, where it looked unpleasantly like blood.

"Oh, confound you, Erranti!" he cried, starting up in great wrath. "That's too damned careless, don't you know!"

Philip, bowing me from the room, seemed neither

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

to see nor hear. His apologies were made later—if at all.

I did not see the Englishmen again. By nine that evening the house was filled with a noisy crowd from town, and the two strangers left early the next morning.

XXII

"The dinner-party," as Madam called it, took place on the last Friday of Dick Thorpe's vacation. He had been for two weeks at Beverley Towers, and on Monday was to return to town, not without expecting to spend his Sundays with his uncle. This pleased me. We had become great friends. On Sunday afternoon Madam told me she would not need me for several hours.

"Follow the little wood-path, *ma bien-aimée*," she said, patting my cheek gently, "a pleasant companion awaits thee there. One is young but once, my Athena!" Then, thinking aloud, "An ugly face, but good and clever. He hates the cards—yes, yes, he hates the cards. Athena"—again addressing me—"one is young but once—enjoy thy youth, *ma fille*, and gather thy roses while the sun shines—no, that's not it, but no matter—run away and enjoy thyself! I sent him there because of the devil-may-cares who haunt the place to-day. Philip's friends—not real friends—gambling friends! They never win his money! I sometimes wonder why, why—yes, why? Go, I would have my siesta. Go, *chérie*." As I left her she was murmuring, "Young but once, but once, but only once, *grand Dieu!*" over and over.

I went slowly to the woods. I felt a trifle sad—and strangely shy. Mr. Thorpe's disturbed looks when I met him put this last to flight.

"Are you cross?" I asked. "What is the matter?"

"I'm sorry"—smiling—"that I look as unpleasant

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

as I feel. I don't like not coming to the house for you. I hope you understood it was Madam's arrangement? She meant to be kind, poor soul, but she's too daft to remember what's what."

"I understood," I said.

We walked in silence to the rustic bench. Mr. Thorpe, who usually had much to say, seemed pre-occupied.

"Will you rest here, and go to the meadow later?" he asked. We often revisited the meadow. I sat down, and when another long silence followed I broke it by an inane remark about the weather.

"It is as warm and sultry as though it were August, yet to-day is the 14th of September."

"I go back to work to-morrow," said Mr. Thorpe, sighing profoundly.

"I thought you liked work," I said. "Your cousin, Mr. St. John, told me you preferred it above anything in the world."

"So I did—once upon a time. Randal loves to ferret out other people's secrets! Not but what I'd like to shout my present secret from the house-tops." Then, very simply, even bluntly, he told me that he loved me—he asked me to be his wife.

We had so much to talk about, Dick and I. I told him of my mother, of her beauty, her wit, of her tragic death. I talked freely to him of my father, telling how badly Lord Ebbrides had served him, then spoke of Percy Stewart—of my love for him.

Nothing is perfect in this world, which is well, I suppose, else we might forget to prepare for the next! On this day of days Dick hurt me by saying he was glad Percy Stewart was dead! Later, when he began to regret his mother's second marriage because of me, saying how much happier I might be

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

had I the prospect of living with her, dwelling on the delight he would have experienced in seeing us together—then, I took great care not to express my deep feeling of gratitude toward her husband, the German baron! And I forgave his outspokenness about Percy.

"What about telling Uncle Beverley, Athena?" I was asked very soon. "Suppose I announce our engagement to-night?"

"No, no," I said; "there is no hurry."

"Yes, there is," Dick persisted, "an excellent reason for hurry. I don't see why we shouldn't be married in two weeks—say the first of October. Now hush, Athena, don't interrupt me, I know what I'm talking about! This house is no place for you. Madam Erranti is all right, of course; but she can't look after you. She's a lady, you'd say? Yes, but half crazy, poor thing; and as for her son—well, the less said of him the better, I imagine."

"Hush!" I whispered, "I hear someone coming."

"A rabbit hopping through the underbrush, my dear. Now, Erranti seems to me an adventurer—I make no doubt that his father was one—a man without principles, you know. Why, the gambling that goes on——"

"Oh, do hush, Dick! I'm sure I hear something bigger than a rabbit," I implored.

"Where?"

"Back among the trees! Please listen."

I held my breath in my eagerness. Dick glanced carelessly around.

"Nonsense, dear! One of the dogs nosing about, nothing more."

"It sounded like a man."

"Tramps?" asked Dick, smiling. "Don't worry. I'll fight them as valiantly as I did the cows," and he returned to the subject of our speedy marriage.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"It's going to be troublesome," I said, after he had talked for some time.

"What is?" stopping short in a telling argument.

"Our both liking our own way so much."

He colored slightly, then began to laugh.

"If I mayn't even name the day"—I followed up my advantage—"a thing every girl is allowed to do, I'm a little afraid I may never have my own way—after."

"I didn't mean to bully you, Athena."

"Perhaps not—but——"

"I won't tell Uncle Beverley, if you really prefer not."

"And," I said, hastily, "we can decide other matters later—next Sunday, Dick."

To this he agreed, though not with a good grace, and at once began on my choice of a betrothal ring. I wanted Nemesis—or nothing. He was not pleased, objected strongly, yet would give me no reason for his dislike of the idea. We both knew Randal's retaining possession of the ring was but a question of time, till the news of his gambling should reach Mr. Beverley. We also felt sure Mr. Beverley would wish me to have Nemesis, since she had been my mother's. So, it seemed to me, Dick had no real reason for objecting. When I pressed him too hard he bluntly said his reason was an excellent one, but I should never know it. His manner was stern, and I let the matter drop, only saying no other ring would suit me.

"You may give me some other trinket, if you wish, in token of our engagement," I added, "something that I can wear all the time."

This pleased him.

We had been too much absorbed in each other to notice any change in the weather or to see that the gloom about us was deepening every moment. The

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

trees shut us in on all sides, their interlacing boughs making even the heavens invisible, so we did not see the great black cloud that climbed sulkily out of the west, eating up, as it grew and grew, blue sky, sunshine, and finally the big, bright sun itself. A fierce glare of lightning followed by a clap of thunder was our first warning of the storm.

"Madam!" I cried, starting to my feet. "She will be frightened, and I so far away! How could I forget her! I must hurry."

"We'll make a dash for it," said Dick.

Putting his arm around me he rushed me through the woods.

"Don't hurry so," he cried, at last, as I flew along the path. "You'll hurt yourself, Athena! I didn't know any girl could run so fast!"

Before we reached the house I ran still faster. The sound of Madam's voice reached me, and her wild scream stung me like a whip. Without a word of farewell to Dick I hurried to her room. She was half mad with terror. As she clung to me, hiding her blanched face in my bosom, I could not forgive myself. In my selfish happiness I had forgotten my duty.

The storm lasted some time, bursting out with renewed violence when I thought it past. By evening the sky cleared. When Dick came it was as peaceful and radiant as if there had been no storm. Madam bade me sit near her veranda door, that she might hear our voices, though not what we said. The sound soothed her.

"Mr. Erranti was on the river with friends when the storm broke," I remarked. "They came for him in a big yacht just after luncheon. Most men seem to like him, Dick, or go with him, at any rate. You never accept his invitations to dinner—or to do anything."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I detest him!"—Dick lowered his voice—"I won't eat his salt."

"My father liked him. Don't you think you are a little prejudiced, Dick?"

Dick, who had been lounging in an arm-chair, now sat up very straight and stared at me.

"When did your father know him, pray, and where?"

"In town, in Wall Street. No, don't think that! I did; now I am ashamed. Philip loved him—tried his best to prevent his speculating."

"Who told you all this, Athena?"

"Philip."

"Indeed! I wonder if it's true."

"Yes," I spoke with decision. "What he has said of my father—and his ways—prove it to be true. Why should he wish to deceive me? What motive could poor Philip have for doing so unkind—so unmanly a thing?"

"Quite a biggish motive, Athena. The man's in love with you. I do wish you wouldn't call him 'Philip.' I don't like it."

"I have promised. I'm sorry, since it displeases you. He was good to my father. Try to judge him fairly, Dick."

"I've been so jealous of him—I am yet. Bad habits are hard to break."

"Jealous of Philip?" I was incredulous. "Yet you think him not a gentleman. Oh, Dick!"

"My dear Athena, can't you understand? His being not quite up to the mark wouldn't count with ninety-nine girls out of a hundred! He's confoundedly handsome, sings—with that wonderful baritone of his—as I didn't suppose any man off the stage could sing. I say nothing of his millions, Athena—they wouldn't tempt you, I know. But he's fascinating—in his disagreeable way!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I laughed. This last was too absurd.

"Not to me," I said, soothingly, seeing Dick was uncomfortable; "and his feeling for me is over. Now I'm just the daughter of an old friend to him."

"Stuff and nonsense," said Dick, crossly.

As he spoke I detected the sound of someone moving stealthily in the room behind us—moving almost noiselessly, but I am said to hear the grass grow. Rising swiftly I looked in. Madam lay asleep. Julie dozed in her chair. It was Cray who prowled within ear-shot. He bowed respectfully as he caught my eye, and whispered that he had come in search of Julie, but would not disturb her. She had waked, however, and went with her husband into the little entry, where they talked softly together.

I went back to the veranda. Had Cray been an eavesdropper? Had he overheard our discussion of Philip? I hoped I had entered in time to prevent this, but I could not be sure.

XXIII

Philip, as usual, went to town with his friends on Monday morning; but, contrary to his wont, did not return until Friday, when he brought a new party of guests home with him. I rode alone every morning that week, but I was surprised when Philip failed to join me on Saturday morning. Still, I thought little of his not coming, although Madam, fretting because he had not told her he would be absent during the week, had more than once asked me if I were in fault.

"Thou hast done nothing to anger him, Athena? Philip has a wild, fierce temper when roused. Art sure he is not displeased?"

When I answered that we were on good terms she shook her head wearily, declaring that she hated men.

"They are devils, one and all, one and all! I hate them, hate them, hate them, and the tortures they devise!"

It had been a happy week for me. Each day there had come a letter from Dick,—my first love-letters! I had little attention to spare for other people, being, I fear, selfishly absorbed in my own happiness. Not that I again forgot Madam and her needs. Indeed, I worried over the consent I had given to be married before Christmas, fearing Madam might miss me too much for her comfort. She had grown accustomed to having me about her, and depended upon me more and more. On the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

other hand Richard, too, needed me. He was alone, and had no home. His income, though modest, was sufficient. I had no right to ask him to wait very long.—He did not come to the Towers for Sunday. A friend of his, in town for a visit only, was taken ill. As he was a stranger in a strange city Dick felt he might not leave him—a disappointment to us both.

Saturday morning, when I returned from my ride, Claude was on the veranda.

"It's real cool this mornin', ain't it, Miss Dean?" was his salutation as I swung myself from the saddle. "Kinder reminds me of the first day you was here! 'Twas the first day, warn't it, when you rescued Mr. R. St. J. from a watery grave? Dear me! how time flies!" He sighed, and looked gloomy. "What do you s'pose?"—following me into the house and gently closing the door, the day was chilly—"he's come back!"

"Who has come back?" I asked, bewildered by his deeply mysterious manner.

"That little sheeny Dutchman, him who hurt the mare. Yes, I thought you'd be astonished, Miss Dean, I'm sure I was. 'For the Land's sake,' I says to myself when I seen him come swaggerin' in, 'if he ain't got cheek!' Norah says she'd like to get just one grip on them curls of his—wool, she calls it—she'd make the fur fly!" He giggled wildly, then drew himself up with sudden dignity, and said, severely, "I'm really surprised at the Boss allowin' him to cross his threshold after——"

I interrupted him. I could not allow Mr. Erranti's butler to find fault with his master before me.

"Very likely Mr. Von Schlange has apologized. No doubt Mr. Erranti had some good reason for inviting him here again."

Claude shook his head.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"If you knewed what I know, Miss Dean," he began. Again I cut him short.

"I don't wish to know, Claude," I said, good-humoredly; "and, after all, it's not our business to criticise Mr. Erranti."

"That's just like you, Miss Dean! Puttin' yourself in with me as if we was both in the same boat, an' smoothin' me down till you know I'll wait on that dirty monkey of a man without rebellion! It's what Norah says—and what we all says—there's no one fit to black your boots for beauty and elligance, yet there ain't one stuck up drop of blood in you; no, sir, not one!"

I ran away upstairs from this torrent of praise. But I was pleased to hear that the servants liked me—as much pleased by Claude's compliment as I was displeased by Philip's disregard for my feelings. What did it mean, I asked myself? Had I, as Madam feared, vexed him in some unknown way? I was hurt by his lack of consideration. As the day went on I had further cause for surprise. Philip ignored me completely. When it was possible to avoid meeting me he turned away; when forced into my presence, he treated me with cold indifference. His face wore a sullen expression, new to me. What it all meant I could not imagine, and Madam wished to know!

Sunday morning she was so unusually fretful that I did not go to church.

"Thou art a headstrong girl," she complained, when I told her I would remain at home, "difficult to understand! What hast thou done to anger Philip? The dreadful look in his eyes—I know it well, that look! Thou art strong, beautiful, determined—but something awful is coming! I feel it in the air. Thou art selfish, Athena, a selfish girl—yes, cruel and selfish!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Dear Madam!" I exclaimed, "I hoped you might be glad to have me with you this morning."

"Not in that frock," wailed the old lady; "not in that vile, hideous frock! And I am so tired of it—yes, tired, tired, tired! To-day is cool—yes, like October. If you thought of me, or cared, you would try to please!"

This meant that I had been expected to appear in a new suit, made for cool weather, a jacket of white velvet and skirt of heavy watered silk. In spite of the freshness of the outside air, which had, as Madam said, the crispness of October, I had no wish for warm garments in Madam's hot-house room. But I dared not thwart her, and made the change she desired.

"Ah!" she cried, clapping her hands gayly as I courtesied gravely in the doorway, "but thou art beautiful! That coat, Julie, Louis Seize, *n'est-ce pas?* No matter, I don't wish the name! Don't dare remember when I forget! You are a cat, Julie! A spiteful cat! An imbecile also! Go, then! Ah, my Athena, it suits thee well, this coat, with its long flaps, great cuffs, *jabot* of lace! A diamond pin, *ma fille*—no? Ah, stubborn one! Quick, Julie, Mademoiselle's coiffure—her braids! Loop them—so—Now, a ribbon, *vite!* *Hélas!* I forgot a hat! Thou shalt have one—of white felt, three-cornered—a cocked hat! How amusing thou art! Who is it thou resemblest? Not George Washington—quite; yet thou art as grave—as severe!"

So she rattled on, while Julie, glowering sulkily at my reflection in the glass, looped my braids in a club and tied them with a broad ribbon. I was much too warm in my velvet coat, but pleased to have Madam cheerful. Scarcely had I had time to congratulate myself upon her change of mood when the report of a gun in the near distance destroyed her

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

comfort. Instantly the room re-echoed to the sound of her screams. In vain we tried to soothe her. The shots, coming in quick succession, seemed to drive her mad. "Blood, blood, blood!" she shrieked, cowering in her chair and covering her ashen face with her twisted hands. "Whose now—whose, whose?"

Throwing her arms around my neck she besought me to save her, to stop Philip, to prevent bloodshed, pouring forth a torrent of entreaties, reproaches, and horrible forebodings till my own brain reeled.

Claude, hearing her outcries, ran in to help us.

"For the Land's sake, ma'am," he implored, "don't take on so! No one ain't bein' killed 'cept pigeons, out to the paddock yonder! Not but what it's disgustin' butcher work to my thinkin', stuffin' live birds inter boxes an' lettin' 'em out all blinded and bewildered, with no sort o' chance to 'scape! Them gents from town they call it sport, they do! I'd like to sport them, just oncet, you bet! But there ain't no use your hollerin' yourself sick over it. That won't do no good!"

She had stopped screaming to listen. Her face was no longer white, a scarlet spot burned in each cheek. At every shot she winced, but kept her lips tightly closed. When Claude ceased speaking she sat erect in her chair, her eyes bright with anger.

"Go to Philip Erranti," she commanded, "tell him to stop this devil's work at once!" Claude lingered, astonished by these orders. "Do you wish to drive me mad?" she cried. "Go, sir!"

While he was gone—on what I felt sure was a hopeless errand—Madam muttered to herself, working her fingers restlessly, but she was not kept waiting long. Claude returned almost immediately. He looked gloomy and resentful.

"Well, sir, well?" demanded Madam, fiercely.

"Mr. Erranti sends his respects, and is deeply

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

grieved that he can't oblige his mother in this trifling matter, since he has promised his friends this amusement." At the end of this speech Claude bowed profoundly, then continued: "Says he to me, says he, 'Tell Madam Erranti,' says he, 'that she mustn't expect me to go back on my word,' says he, 'for that,' says he, 'is something which I never do!' and that's all he said, ma'am."

Disgust and disapproval in every feature, in every movement, poor Claude left the room.

Madam began to laugh, a strange, strident laugh, terrible to hear. It grew louder and louder, and before many moments had passed turned into a wild, unearthly screaming. Julie's dark face was ghastly with terror.

"Mademoiselle," she whispered, hoarsely, "it may kill her! For the love of God—Mademoiselle!"

I knew what she would have me do.

"You try first, Julie," I said, eagerly.

"No, no," shaking her head, "I dare not! He would not listen to me!"

"I will go," I said desperately, almost fiercely. I pressed Madam closer to me. "If you will be good," I cried, striving to dominate those awful screams, "I will go to Philip."

She made a pitiful attempt to regain her self-control, but at each report of the shot-guns her cries grew wilder. I placed her in Julie's arms and left the house.

The men were all assembled, as Claude had said, in the large paddock behind the stables. As I pushed open the tall gate and entered, pausing to look about me, I thought of the morning when I had come there on as difficult an errand—to decide the fate of the mare. It was a beautiful day, clear, cool, and full of sunshine,—truly one of God's days. The group of men who were indulging in the unmanly

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

amusement of pigeon-shooting had evidently forgotten that it was Sunday, or did not care; the last day, surely, on which the gentlest of His creatures should be subjected to torture.

It was in vain that I looked for someone to send to Mr. Erranti. The stables seemed deserted. I felt I had no time to waste in searching for a messenger, but must go myself. As I hesitated a man left the group opposite, took up a position facing the box on the ground—at which I had not dared look—and fired at the fluttering ball of feathers that the hateful trap seemed to vomit forth. Instinctively I turned my back, covering my eyes with my hands. Another moment and someone touched me on the shoulder. I looked up. It was Randal St. John.

"Come to try your luck, Miss Dean?" I bowed. "No good, I'm afraid," he said, lightly. "Erranti's in a queer mood to-day. Temper of a rattlesnake that's been trampled on. Take my advice and try cotton in Madam's ears."

He had, it seemed, been present on the delivery of Claude's message. He was ubiquitous.

"Please tell Mr. Erranti that I wish to speak to him."

"All right, Miss Dean," he spoke, cheerfully, "since you're bent on cutting your lovely throat!"

He went to Philip, who, leaving his friends, came slowly toward me in unwilling obedience to my summons, his handsome face marred by its expression of sullen unfriendliness. When I would have spoken he silenced me by a gesture, and said:

"I regret, Miss Dean, that you should have taken the trouble of coming here in obedience to a senseless whim of my mother's. If she objects to the noise of the guns she can be carried into my library, and remain there until it is over. The day is cool enough to allow the closing of windows."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Something in his face told me he took pleasure in thwarting me. I knew that should I humble myself to beg that the shooting might cease, either in kindness to Madam or as a special favor toward myself, I should gain nothing—save his scorn. I was turning away without a word when Randal rushed up to us.

“Say, Miss Dean,” he cried, eagerly, “Cray has just let out that you shoot, yourself, and brags that you could make us all sing small. Now, Erranti, old chappie, if you’ll only say the word, we can have no end of a good time. Miss Dean wishes us to stop shooting and profaning the Sabbath;”—here the embryo clergyman grinned—“very well, I vote we have a match for it. Let Miss Dean have a try at five pigeons. If she kills three, we’ll undertake to continue our evil sport ‘Far away from home and mother’!—in other words, somewhere where Madam can’t hear the guns. If Miss Dean kills all five”—this in a gently sarcastic tone—“then she gets the pot, out and out. We’ll swear off, and she may have the birds, alive or dead—as she chooses.”

As he unfolded his plan the shooting ceased. I knew, without looking, that the men were all staring in our direction, discussing the turn affairs had taken. Philip did not speak, but stood quite still, sombrely contemplating my white face—white with the pallor born of mental pain.

“Well, is it on?” demanded Randal, eagerly.

“As you please,” said Philip, shortly, and he turned and left us, rejoining his guests.

“You accept, Miss Dean?”

My lips felt very dry—so dry I had to try twice before I could speak.

“Yes,” I said, at last.

There was nothing else to say. I had no choice. Since the chance was given me to help Madam, to

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

save many innocent birds from misery, what matter that I, and five pigeons, must be sacrificed? My mind seemed to go to sleep. I had the odd sensation in my head which always accompanies this collapse. I found myself hoping I might not disgrace myself by fainting after my task was done—I knew I should not until after. I dreaded, with the old childish dread, the noise that must follow the pulling of the trigger. I caught myself praying to my father not to let me miss.

Meanwhile Randal was accompanying me across the paddock to the spot where I must stand. I was aware that he was paying me compliments, admiring my handsome clothes, comparing me to Diana. I knew that the crowd of men were betting heavily, that Cray was staring at me in a frightened way, and that Philip had bitten his lips until they bled.

Like an automaton I placed myself in position, and received the gun Randal handed me.

"Say when you're ready," he whispered.

The green paddock suddenly swung up and displaced the sky.

"O God!" I prayed silently, "dear God in Heaven, do not let me fail!"

I gave the signal.

On looking back I wonder—after so many years spent without practice—how I accomplished that hard task. For I shot the five pigeons tossed into the September sunshine;—shot them so quickly that I may dare believe they did not know what killed them. Poor little fluffy, foolish things! They died, but many were saved.

No applause followed my success; instead, a strange silence prevailed. I was allowed to leave without the added insult of congratulations. I walked slowly back to the house through a reeling universe, scarcely able to hold myself erect or to

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

make my way thither. But poor Madam was so unstrung that she needed all my thoughts and attention, and little by little my weakness passed. The excitement had been too much for her feeble health. By night she became feverish, and, since Philip with his friends had left immediately after the shooting, the responsibility devolved entirely upon me. I did not leave her room, and at four in the morning she called me to her.

"I think I shall not live very long, Athena," she said, feebly. "Promise that you will stay with me to the end."

I could not promise.

"Through November, Athena," she pleaded, "through November, *ma bien-aimée*! In that dreary, sodden month—I shall die. Oh, promise, until then—Athena——"

"I will," I said solemnly, alarmed by her manner. She sank back, contented, among her pillows.

XXIV

That Sunday was the beginning of a sad week. Madam became so alarmingly ill that I telegraphed for instructions on Monday. I did not know where to send for medical aid. Madam had had no physician during my stay at the Hall, and I dared not, on my own responsibility, call in a stranger. But Philip answered my telegram in person, bringing with him the doctor who had cared for Madam the previous winter in town. Philip was deeply shocked by her condition, suffering at sight of her pain. I heard him tell the doctor that it was all owing to his brutality.

"Nonsense!" said the doctor, "nonsense! You're no saint, I grant, if I may believe all the stories I hear; but I'll bear witness to your being the best of sons."

"Not in this instance," said Philip, gloomily. "You say she's suffering from some shock—so she is, owing to my devilish obstinacy! I'd just met with a great misfortune——"

"Not lost money, I hope?"

"Damn money!" was the impatient answer. "I wish to Heaven it had been money. It was the pigeon match—the noise——" He broke off suddenly—his eyes on me—then left the room.

The doctor gave me his orders. Madam was in need of good nursing and complete repose, little else.

"She's weathered a good many terrible storms, I guess," he said; "gone through the kind of excite-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ments that wear out body and mind. Her heart is weak; any sudden shock may kill her. Try to lead a tranquil life, my dear young lady," he smiled a trifle unpleasantly, "you'll find it pays!"

Then I recognized him as one of the Fourth of July party, and wondered that Philip had faith in his skill. Later I heard that but for his love of fast living he might have risen high in his profession. He was very clever.

On Friday morning Claude beckoned me into the hall with a mysterious finger.

"Company for you in the library!"

Because of Madam he whispered laboriously, but his suppressed simper told me whom I was to see. How came Dick in Droneton at that hour? I had no sooner greeted him than I voiced this question.

"Are you just from town, Dick?"

"Just from the train. I had to see you immediately. I want you to marry me to-day, Athena, and sail with me to-morrow."

I stared in wonder.

"Marry you—sail! Why, what nonsense, Dick. Sail where?"

"To Russia," he said, coolly. "I've got to start at once to look after an estate that's been left to one of our clients. It's going to be a big thing, Athena, and it's no end of a compliment the governor's paying me. Lots of difficulties in the way, probably. Russian relatives squabbling over the will, etc. It will take two months, perhaps three, to straighten it all out, and I want you with me, dear."

He began to coax—he coaxed very well, too—but Madam was too ill to be left, and I said so.

"I promised to stay with her through November, Dick. I must keep my word."

There was much grumbling at this; but I was in the right, and Dick knew it.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"You'll marry me directly I come home, Athena?"

"Yes."

"You won't give Erranti a chance to persuade you to change your mind?"

"Dick!"

"Well, well, I didn't mean to be nasty. Somehow I can't be easy about that man. I don't trust him."

"Nor me, apparently."

"Don't be angry, Athena. I'm deadly ashamed of what I said. I'd give a good deal if he were on his last legs instead of that nice old woman. See here. I shall leave a sealed letter with Uncle Beverley, telling him what to do in case anything happens to me. Don't look so frightened, Athena! It's only like taking an umbrella to keep off problematical rain. I wish you'd let me announce our engagement before I go."

"No, no," I begged. "It has been for such a short time."

"That's what troubles me," he said, moodily. "I know I've rushed matters. If you were coming with me I might make you keep on liking me—I know I could—but when you have time to think me over, and I'm not on hand to keep telling you how fine a fellow I am—" He smiled ruefully, then, taking a little box from his pocket, gave it me. "Here's something you must wear for my sake, sweetheart."

A beautiful cross, made of great pearls! Dick clasped the slender chain from which it hung around my throat. It was very lovely, he had shown such taste. But pearls!

Time slipped away and our parting was over. Again I took up my post by Madam's bedside. I felt very sad, very lonely, but I said to myself that three months would soon be over and then no more partings, please God. In the meantime there would

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

be letters, and I comforted myself by the thought that Dick would sail in pleasant ignorance of the disagreeables at Highgrove Hall. I had not told of the pigeon-match. Randal, for his own sake, had kept silence. My trials were all my own, and must remain so.

The day after Richard's departure—Sunday afternoon—I was in the garden for a half hour of fresh air when Philip joined me. He looked grave and very sad. I was on a bench by the spring, and would have risen, but he stopped me by a gesture.

"You have come out for a moment's repose? I am glad. You look very tired, Athena. May I sit down?" I bowed. He seated himself beside me. "I am very sorry you could not go to church this morning. I know you must have wished to pray for those who go down to the sea in ships. Why look so surprised, my child? Did you think me blind? A lover's eyes are proverbially quick to see, Athena—don't go," as I rose to leave him. "I'll say nothing that the fiancée of Richard Thorpe need object to hear."

I sat down again mechanically. So my secret was no secret! How many knew?

Philip watched me, as if he would read my thoughts. There was understanding and sympathy in his eyes. He looked so kind, so truly friendly, that my heart softened.

"How did you guess?" I asked.

"I did not guess—Cray told me. Listen, and you shall hear everything. I won't attempt to justify my brutal behavior—nor ask you to overlook it—but simply tell you why the devil who lives in me was unchained. Yes, Athena, I firmly believe that all men—and some women—have a private devil of their own. They keep him chained and half starved, as a rule, but occasionally he breaks loose, when he

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

gluts himself on wickedness—hence the expression that “There’s the devil to pay!”

He was silent. I thought of my own demon, Pride, so hard to keep down! Then of another, sometimes called an Unforgiving Spirit.

“Of course, Athena, this is hard for you to understand.”

“Not at all. You have convinced me that I have several fiends, all clanking their chains rebelliously.”

Philip laughed.

“What an absurd child! But there—let me finish what I have to say, it’s none too agreeable, I want to get it over. On a certain afternoon, not long ago, Cray chanced to make a short cut through the woods, and overheard—what was not intended for his long ears. He came and told me; he might as well have stuck a knife into my heart! Don’t look so frightened, child! Because I am beaten in the race I sha’n’t weary you with my bewailings. I am thankful to say I have enough sense to know when I am out of it. Henceforth I ask no more than the kind consideration you would show any old friend of your father’s. For allowing the pain of the unexpected blow to turn me savage at first, I most humbly beg your pardon. I am half savage I sometimes think. I’ve too much of my mother in me.”

I smiled.

“To me Madam seems thoroughly civilized, Philip.”

“Yes,” he said, absently, “she is. I wish you might persuade her to forgive me, Athena. But that can’t be until you forgive me yourself. Won’t you try to?”

As I hesitated, not knowing how to answer, he said, abruptly:

“Mr. Thorpe is going to England?”

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON.

"Yes, but only on his way to Russia. He is not to stay in England."

"To Russia, Athena? May I hear—but no, you will not wish to tell me."

This was no secret, so I explained Dick's reason for so sudden a departure. Then, putting my shyness in my pocket—along with my pride—I asked if Cray had imparted his news to many people.

"No, Athena. He spoke to no one save myself. I told him to hold his tongue. He will obey me. You wish only your own and Mr. Thorpe's relations to know—of it—for the present?"

It was easy to see that the subject was a trying one to Philip. I was sorry for his pain.

"No one is to know until after Mr. Thorpe's return. I shall ask you to keep my secret, Philip."

"What, no one?" he exclaimed. "Not Mr. Beverley? Not Randal?"

"No one, Philip."

After this he fell into a reverie so profound that he seemed to forget my very existence. He started when at last I rose to return home.

"Don't go just yet," he said, hastily; "rest a little longer. Let me tell you how sorry I am for you, poor, desolate child," holding out his hand. "Let me promise to guard your secret as if it were my own. Give me your forgiveness, Athena, and the right to watch over you, as your sincere friend, until Mr. Thorpe comes to claim you. For the sake of your father, Athena, who is no longer here to protect his little daughter."

I was touched by this unselfishness, and placed my hand confidently in his.

"You forgive me, then?"

I bowed.

"You will win my mother's forgiveness for me?"

"I will try, Philip."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

He went with me to the house, and we entered her room together.

"What does this mean?" she whispered feebly, as I rearranged her pillows.

"Peace on earth, good-will toward men," I said, kissing her faded cheek.

Philip fell on his knees by the bedside, pressing his lips to the trembling hand that plucked at the coverlet.

"*Maman, maman!*" he implored. I detected the sound of tears in his voice.

"He may give me my broth," said Madam. I slipped quietly from the room.

XXV

Madam grew better daily after her reconciliation with Philip, and was soon herself again, whimsical, capricious, hard to please, but often gay. She could not conceal her satisfaction at the news of Richard's departure, saying she wanted me all to herself for a time.

"I like him well, the young Thorpe, but a short absence will do no harm. Absence makes the heart grow—wrong? No, no; the absent are always—fond? Ah, my poor head—tell me what I would say, Athena! But no, talk of something else—of thy cross, *par exemple!* Thou wilt not wear my diamonds, why then another's pearls? Ah, I do but tease thee! Wear thy pretty cross, I guess what meaning it has for thee. But pearls mean something sad, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"*Perlen bedeuten Thränen!*" I quoted, slowly.

"Are we, then, in that horrid Tower of Babel, Athena," she demanded, petulantly, "that I must listen to gibberish? Not that I believe that fable, but it matters not what I believe, as it is to hell I must go! Yes, *à l'enfer, à l'enfer, à l'enfer!*"

Her eyes began to glitter.

"'Pearls mean tears,' " I translated, hurriedly; "but I hope that may be only idle superstition."

Madam stared at me in dismay.

"*Grand Dieu!*" she exclaimed. "What canst thou do to ward off this evil? Tears, meaning tears—Ah, Athena!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I did not say so, but my pearls affected me as they did her. I had wished from the first that Dick had chosen a less ill-omened love-token. Philip had never spoken of my cross, but I knew he must have noticed it. He saw everything.

October had come, and in great glory of color. To my delight Philip persuaded Madam to spend a few days on the Charlotte, cruising up and down the river, that she might enjoy the beauty of the changing foliage, and have an outing before the indoor life of winter set in. She enjoyed the bustle of departure and the small ceremonies attending our going on board the Charlotte, decked in her gayest bunting, captain and crew in fine new uniform. The servants entered with spirit into Claude's proposal to give us "a jolly good send-off!"

They swarmed down upon the grassy point, Norah weighted with a huge basket of luncheon.

"Sure, Miss Athayna, how'll that new French cook be after knowin' the tastes of a sick old lady?"

It was a perfect day, the atmosphere so flattering that even Highgrove Hall—that gloomy pile of bricks—looked warm-colored and imposing. The sun smiled down upon house, woodland, and river with its wonderful October radiance. Madam laughed at my insisting that October sunbeams held more gold in their glances than those of any other month.

"Athena, my child," said Philip, when bidding me good-bye—he was not to go with us—"I hope you may enjoy this trip. Go on shore whenever you feel inclined, but, as a favor to me, don't go alone. Cray, and a new maid I have engaged—for you ostensibly, *maman* needs two women about her, but it is only by pretending this maid is yours that I can manage the matter—will always be ready to act as your body-guard. This woman, Mathilde, can help Julie at

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

any time with *maman*. You don't object, I hope, to the arrangement?"

I did, but was careful not to say so. An unwise arrangement, I thought, setting aside the discomfort it promised me. Should the Frenchwomen not agree, Madam might fall between two stools instead of being better tended. It would be my duty to keep them on good terms—no light task!

"I will send for Mathilde," said Philip, unconscious of my disapproval. When the woman came he spoke of me to her as Miss Derohan instead of Miss Dean. I did not ask him why, thinking it merely a slip of the tongue. Mathilde's appearance was not prepossessing. Black-browed, stolid-faced, she looked as though she might be both obstinate and sulky. Her addition to our party pleased me little.

"Good-bye, Athena!" said Philip, taking my hand. "Let the maids save you from close attendance on *Maman*. Try to amuse yourself, to be happy—and, I beg, never go ashore alone."

He went to Madam, spoke at length with her, and kissed her many times.

The servants, preceded by Don, barking frantically, ran to the end of the point. The Charlotte vied with Don, in a series of ear-piercing whistles. The servants cheered, the crew hurrahed, Madam clapped her hands with glee. Philip, standing erect in the rowboat that was taking him ashore, smiled as he waved his hand to Madam, an odd look, as of triumph, on his dark face.

"Does Madame desire another wrap?"

I turned, to find the new maid close behind me. In her hand she carried a silk shawl. Madam answered before I could.

"To whom are you speaking, pray? I am Madam Erranti. Are you really stupid? Or do you

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

wish to appear so! Mademoiselle Athena does not wish that shawl. It would ruin her toilet. You, a Frenchwoman, know no better? Go, at once! Athena, she is a fool! Her face is bad—yes, bad! Already I detest her. More imbecile than thou, Julie,” as Julie came to take her below, “and that is too much!”

“Ah, Madame, have patience with poor Mathilde! She will soon learn. She is not so stupid.”

“You praise her, Julie? Wonder of wonders! You know her, perhaps?”

“But yes, Madame. An old friend.”

“Humph!” muttered Madam. “A fine recommendation, truly!”

Life on the Charlotte pleased Madam while the fine weather lasted, but no sooner did the sky become gray than she commanded the captain to take her home at once! I was sorry to return. The trip had been delightful. The beauty of the scenery charmed me; but Madam had had enough. She had refused to start on a Friday, but the thought of returning on that day did not disturb her. It did me. I struggled against the feeling in vain, but then I dreaded recommencing the old life in Highgrove Hall. It was like returning to a prison.

I looked wistfully at the big red house looming up among its trees as we cast anchor, and wished it were not so gloomy and forbidding. Houses are so like people in their widely differing expressions. The Hall had a repellent face. Madam did not share my depression, although the clouds hung low and an east wind moaned drearily. Her one desire was to creep back into her cage. As I followed the men who carried her up the bank my heart sank lower and lower. No one came to welcome us. Not even Don! I wondered not to see Claude dash out to greet us.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

We entered Madam's room through the glass door opening on the veranda. If the surroundings of the house and its own grim walls looked dismal, her gay apartment wore its brightest air. A fire crackled on the hearth, the many lamps burned brightly, and chrysanthemums—red, pink, yellow, many-tinted—were heaped in every bowl and vase. Madam, delighted, forgot to be tired. All her old treasures were examined with fresh interest. Julie had to open the chests and display their contents, while I, as lay-figure, was called upon to hang shawls, silks, and laces about my shoulders. Thus the first hour passed, and Philip, driving rapidly up the avenue in his dog-cart, came upon us in the midst of this strange pastime.

He was in high spirits over Madam's return, delighted with the improvement in her appearance, and welcomed us both with enthusiasm. For some unknown reason his warmth of greeting seemed to irritate the whimsical old lady. Lying back in her chair she watched him keenly, suspicion in her bright, dark eyes. I had thought to take advantage of Philip's presence by slipping away to hunt up my laggard friends of the servants' hall, but Madam, detecting my movement doorward, called to me.

"Don't leave me, Athena," she said, imperiously. "Without thee I feel ever alone. Thou and I, we understand each other, as people of birth and breeding should. I weary of *la canaille*—of thee, never!"

"I only wished to see if all were well below stairs," I said, still hoping to escape. "I thought, with Philip to talk to, you wouldn't need me."

Madam laughed, a scornful little laugh, then said, in a very unpleasant manner:

"Do you hear her, Philip? This little aristocrat thinks you can fill her place! She is humble, *n'est-*

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ce pas? Or shall we say ignorant? Yes, yes, a better word. Mlle. Derohan is—ignorant of your true worth! Ignorant, yes, yes, yes, ignorant, truly!”

She laughed with the pretence of being very merry indeed—a disagreeable laugh. We both, Philip and I, wished to speak of something that might divert her mind: one of her bad attacks seemed imminent. But we had not time.

“He is a riddle, is this Philip, my Athena,” she went on, “a riddle hard for a gentlewoman like thee to read. Philip! The name was given him because of its suitable meaning——”

“Never mind my name, *maman*,” he broke in, “Athena is not interested in it or its meaning. Why so cross with me, *chère petite maman*?” He stooped low over her chair, smiling coaxingly down upon the scowling face. “Thou art but just come home, and already so cruel!”

“Why, then, that exultant look?” she said, shrilly. “Why do thine eyes shine? Hast thou won much money, Gambler? Is it gain that brings the look I know so well, too well, *grand Dieu!* that evil look upon thy wild, dark face? Quick, then, an answer—come!”

She was terribly excited. Philip had paled under his tan.

“If I look glad it is that I have thee beside me once more, *chérie*.”

He spoke tenderly, and would have kissed her, but she drew back, swept by a very storm of passion.

“Liar!” she screamed. “Liar! like thy father before thee! I read thy face as I at last read his, and brand it—thus!”

Leaning forward, she struck him across the face with all her force.

“Leave us, Athena!” commanded Philip, sternly.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

As I obeyed, knowing he alone could quiet her, she was screaming:

"Blood upon thy hands—yes, blood, blood, blood! Thy——"

I was thankful to close the door upon her cries.

I went in search of Norah and Claude, and was greeted by the sound of lively conversation and gay laughter when I reached the basement hall. I paused a moment before entering the kitchen, when I discovered not only that the voices of the speakers were strange to me but that the conversation was in French. As I hesitated, surprised, a man came out of the kitchen. Seeing me he approached and asked what I wished. He was a stranger, yet seemed at home.

"I am Mademoiselle Derohan," I said in French, he having used that language.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," bowing respectfully. "Mademoiselle seeks her *femme de chambre*, perhaps? Mathilde is already upstairs."

He looked at me with evident, but respectful, curiosity. Unwilling to ask questions I thanked him, as though I had learned what I wished, and went slowly up the staircase. As I opened the door at its top he re-entered the kitchen, and I heard him exclaim:

"I have seen her! Beautiful as an angel! As——"

I closed the door swiftly and noiselessly behind me. From Madam's room came the sound of singing. I knew Philip had quieted her, since he was lulling her to sleep with her favorite song, the "Adelaide," and I sat down in the hall to wait for him. He must explain the absence of Claude. When he came he looked weary, almost haggard, but seeing me his face brightened.

"Asleep," he said, in answer to my questioning

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

glance. "Asleep and comfortable. A sad home-coming for you, you tender-hearted child, but I have something in my desk that may cheer you."

The color swept into my cheeks. So a letter from Dick had come! Philip did not offer to fetch it, and I did not like to ask him to.

"It is good to have you back again, Athena," taking my hand in his and patting it in fatherly fashion. "I missed our fair little girl more than I can say. *Maman* and I may well hope young Thorpe will remain away his full two months."

I rose, withdrawing my hand.

"It is time to dress for dinner."

"I suppose it is, child, but François will beat a warning tattoo on the gong. Let us wait for him. No?"—as I did not sit down—"You won't stay? Ah, it's the letter you want! Come to the library, then."

He unlocked his desk and gave me my letter.

"Philip."

"Yes, Athena! It is the only one. Not that? What is it you wish, child?"

"Who is François, and where is Claude?"

"François, my dear, is the new butler. Claude, as you call him, has sought other worlds to conquer. Why do you look so astonished? Dear me, child, I forgot you might expect me to write you of the change in our household brigade! The truth is, I can't always remember your absurd notions about your duties here. Your real duty is to make others happy by being so yourself. Are you just a little bit happy, daughter of my friend?"

I was too much distressed by his news to answer his nonsense.

"All gone, Philip? Norah—all the others, gone?"

"Yes," he said, shortly, as if vexed by my man-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ner, "all. Not only the house servants but stablemen and gardeners—all have left. I made a clean sweep. They were discontented, and I'll have no grumblers here. This lot, French, Julie and Cray must manage. They shall run the domestic machine."

I went swiftly away. The matter was ended.

"Athena!" Philip cried, catching up with me at the foot of the staircase, "Athena! Does this change displease you so much?"

My heart was sore over the loss of Claude and Norah.

"No message was left for me?" I faltered.

"Foolish girl! Think of your caring for that noisy, stupid crew! Had I known of your partiality I might have stooped to beg them to remain! Now we are on this subject, dear child, I must tell you that you are not to tire yourself out about the house in future. No more housekeeping, please! What will Thorpe say if I let you wear yourself to a shadow during his absence?"

I glanced up the staircase, eager to be gone, and was foolish enough to have an odd sensation of being watched by the marble Venus in her niche above us. I was ashamed of the feeling of dislike which swept over me as I saw her again. Why should I so hate the insolence of her smile?

"Randal is coming to dine with us in honor of your return, Athena. Go and bid Mathilde get out your prettiest gown—don't pain me by looking as though you were sorry to be at home again."

I went to my room quickly. I did not like the new order of things. I did not like an odd something in Philip's voice and manner when he spoke of Dick. As Madam said, he was a riddle.

XXVI

A three days' storm followed our return to the Hall. Philip remained at home Saturday as well as Sunday, and, having no men stopping with him, wished me to play billiards with him, to listen while he read aloud or sang—in short, to give him all the time spent out of Madam's room. In return he took me to church on Sunday in spite of the storm. It was with a sigh of relief that I saw him leave for town on Monday morning. I was weary of serving two masters.

At five that afternoon Madam bade me go for a walk. The rain had stopped, but from the looks of the heavy clouds might be expected to recommence at any moment.

"A hang-dog expression does not become thee," said Madam, rudely. "Go exorcise it away. Philip will wish to see thee smile on his return. He is a fool. All men are fools. Fools and devils by turn!"

I did not like to leave her. The sky was lowering, depressing. I tried to excuse myself from going, and was informed that I was conceited, imagining myself of too great importance.

"Pray, how did we exist before we saw thy face, miss?" she inquired, with intense scorn. "A beautiful face, but not clever. A marble girl would have as much intelligence as thou! Good, yes—but dull! No spirits, no gayety, no conversation! The men have spoiled thee with their admiration; but from me, an old woman, learn the truth. Thou art ex-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

quisite, but — of—a—dulness—most—wearisome!!
Go walk, keep thy beauty! It is all thou hast!"

I obeyed.

The garden proved too depressing; ragged, forlorn, after the scourging of the storm. I then tried the wood-path, which one might always expect to find dismal and so feel the changes of wind and weather less. As I walked under its heavy, wet canopy of branches drops of water pattered down. My feet slipped on the soaked mosses covering the narrow path. Tree-trunks, undergrowth—all seemed to exude dampness and slime.

I had expected to feel pleasure at revisiting the rustic bench where Dick had told me what I liked so much to hear, but instead of pleasure I found only memories of Cray lurking, a furtive listener, in the thick woods. A presentiment of evil took possession of me. In vain I reminded myself of Dick's cheerful letter. I shivered; vague, shadowy, the odd dread lingered. To shake it off the better I walked hurriedly on. Then I heard someone coming along the path behind me. I glanced back. No one was in sight. As I had stopped to look the footsteps had ceased. Thinking I was mistaken I went on. The stealthy tread recommenced. Again I stood still. Not a sound. I walked on. The person followed. It was like the child's game, "Follow my leader."

Annoyed, for the person behind me was between me and home—more than half a mile distant—I hastened onward; but as fast as I went—I almost ran—my unseen companion kept pace. Bitterly repenting my folly in choosing the lonely path I tried to decide what was best to do. Should I go on into the meadow and make a bold dash across it to the highroad, or follow the path skirting the wall to the lodge, where I might claim the protection of surly

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Pat, who had not been dismissed with the other servants? I chose the latter course, but was unable to keep to it. My pursuer, taking advantage of a curve in the path which served to screen him, had gained on me, was so near I could hear his heavy breathing. The door in the wall was now but a few feet away. With my heart beating like a trip-hammer, the remembrance of all the horrid stories I had heard of tramps surging through my brain, I seized the knob. The door was locked.

This untoward discovery restored my courage. I had no longer to think, to decide, but to act. Suddenly cool I placed my back against the wall and turned to confront—François!

Yes, François! The new butler! Big, broad-shouldered, much out of breath, greatly embarrassed, Claude's successor stood sheepishly before me. I had much ado not to laugh, so absurd seemed my flight from Madam's messenger.

"Had I known it was you I should have waited, François," I said, smiling. "What is your message?"

"Message, Mademoiselle? I have none."

I did not like his face; he had shifty eyes, a sly expression. I looked at him, surprised by his answer.

"Then what do you wish?"

"Nothing, Mademoiselle." The shifty eyes sought the ground.

"You are out for a walk, perhaps," I said, haughtily. "Pray continue it—at once."

He did not move. I grew indignant.

"Explain yourself, François! Your conduct is strange, to say the least. Why do you remain here when I desire you to go on? Answer, please."

"I have to obey orders, Mademoiselle."

"Whose, pray?"

"Monsieur's."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"What are Monsieur's orders?" I asked, sternly.

"To follow Mademoiselle," was the surprising answer.

"To follow me secretly?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle." Then, seeing my look of incredulity, of suspicion, even, he added, "Monsieur said Mademoiselle preferred to walk unattended, must not know that I followed, and it has been difficult—yes, of a difficulty extreme, impossible!" He wiped his face on a large silk handkerchief. "The roads are new to me, to-day of a wetness terrible. Mademoiselle walks now rapidly, now slowly, sometimes stops! Mathilde was to have come with me, but feared the damp! A cat, Mathilde!" He shot a sideways glance at me from his narrow eyes. "Will it please Mademoiselle to resume her promenade?"

I turned without a word and followed the path under the wall to the lodge and entrance gates. Since last seeing them the open-work iron of these gates had been planked over. One could no longer look out upon the high road. It struck me as a disagreeable change, and I wondered why it had been made. As I stood there surly Pat limped from the lodge. His unpleasant face wore an expression of evil enjoyment. Greeting him civilly, I questioned him about the new arrangement. He looked at me closely, his little eyes sparkling with malignancy, and, rubbing his hands, said:

"We be goin' to keep intruders out! We be goin' to keep in what's in, an' have no pokin's, nor pryin's, nor meddlin's with what's our own! Them as won't stay shut out an' locked out we'll shoot out! Them's my orders."

As he finished speaking there came the quick tramp of a horse's hoofs outside and the cry of "Gate!" It was Philip on Captain Kidd. Both horse and rider were plastered with mud.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"What a pleasant surprise!" cried Philip, dismounting. "Listen to the Captain whinny! He is as glad as I."

"When did you come home?" I asked, stroking the Captain's velvety nose. "I did not know the carriage had gone for you."

"Shortly after luncheon. I stopped the carriage at the stables. I didn't wish to be heard." He hesitated, then said, "The truth is, my familiar—the devil I told you of—broke loose to-day and took possession."

"Yes?"

"Oh, he drove me home"—with an odd laugh—"though I fought him all the way. It wasn't till I got him on Captain Kidd and tore for miles through mud and mire that I mastered him."

I looked at Philip curiously. His handsome face bore the traces of recent excitement.

"You are pleased to speak in parables," I said at last; "but where has my watch-dog gone?"

François had vanished.

"You take your turn, Athena! What may 'watch-dog' mean?"

"François—who watches and dogs my footsteps."

"Ah, the clumsy fool!" exclaimed Philip, a deep flush showing through his tan. "So he has bungled! I wished you to feel free, yet to be guarded, Athena. An unpleasant affair has lately occurred in the woods near Droneton. Ladies must not go unattended. I know François to be strong and resolute. I thought him clever enough to follow, yet to keep out of sight."

"Is that why the gates are kept locked?"

"Meaning the doors in the boundary walls? Yes, Athena. You don't object, my child?"

"No."

"You don't look upon me as your jailer, Athena?"

I smiled. His language was so often high-flown.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I see no keys dangling from your belt, Philip."

His lips parted as if he were about to answer, but instead he reclosed them firmly and looked away.

"Is Mr. St. John barred out?"

"Along with the other tramps, you would say? No. Mr. Beverley owns the door in the north wall as well as I. Randal has a key."

It seemed a ridiculous proceeding to me. This locking up of the three entrances when the river-front was unfenced and free. Tramps might enter as easily as before and skulk through the woods unseen. The railroad-track was always their high-road from town to town. I determined not to forget Don in future, much preferring him to François.

As I walked with Philip along the avenue it seemed like following some tunnel underground. We might have been entering a mine. There was nothing grand in its gloom. Its trees were too weedy. Lank and green, after their beating by the storm, they reminded me of lean, slimy reptiles. Unconsciously I hastened my pace.

"Don't hurry so," remonstrated Philip. "It's pleasant here under the trees."

I thought it might have been, for a frog.

"Are you attached to this place, to Highgrove, Philip?"

"No," he said, slowly, "not attached to it, but it suits me in many ways. *Maman*, you know, desires to lead a retired life, and I like to live where I can do what I choose without the annoyance of grumbling neighbors. Here no one may sit, telescope at eye, watching my household."

"Only old Mr. Beverley," I said, smiling. "His library windows command the upper stories of the Hall."

Philip stared at me oddly for a moment, then said, as if I had not spoken:

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"*Maman* will be pleased that I have at last done as she wished in regard to the entrance. She was nervous whenever she looked through the bars. Yet she may affect surprise when she hears they are covered! The planking hurts the appearance of the gates, but if it quiets her it don't matter. *Pauvre petite maman!*"

The first time Madam saw the gates she did appear surprised.

"*Ciel!*" she cried. "What does this mean? Am I to see nothing after my weary crawl through this mouldy avenue, save surly Pat? Here, pull off those boards, you François! Randal, lend him your aid! I will see out—I will, I will, I will!"

Randal, our companion as usual, tried to soothe her.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I wonder at your getting mad with Erranti when he's paying you the prettiest kind of a compliment!"

"A compliment?" said Madam. "If you're not quite a fool, young Randal, perhaps you'll explain your meaning—that is, if you mean anything, which you rarely do!" Then, in a loud aside to me, "You do right to despise this imbecile! He is naught but a lean bundle of rags and affectation!" Randal grinned. "*Eh bien, eh bien,*" impatiently, "the compliment in those ugly boards? Explain, explain—and quickly!"

"Why, you see," he drawled, "when a man loves a woman he wants to guard her from envious eyes, to keep her all to himself, to keep other fellows from having a chance, to——"

"Hold your tongue, sir!" said the old lady, imperiously. "You are not only a fool, but an impertinent one!"

"Dear Madam Erranti," at last he spoke seriously, "forgive my nonsense! Sometimes my tongue

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

seems to wag of itself. Miss Athena sets me off, she's so deuced straight-laced and priggish. No, no, don't scowl, I didn't mean that! Joking aside, Erranti has done a first-class thing in shutting up that gate. Curious people from all 'round have got a way of peeping in to see who lives here——"

"Don't listen to him," I interrupted; "that is indeed nonsense!" But I spoke too late. Madam was thoroughly frightened.

In vain I tried to undo the harm his silly speech had done. She never objected to the boarded gate again, and even seemed afraid to venture near it. We lived the life of hermits, in spite of the coming each week of a crowd of men to gamble with Philip. He often sat up all night playing "*rouge et noir*." I used to hear him stealing into his room at four in the morning. When his friends were obtrusively noisy he sang, hoping, I fancied, to drown the sound of their drunken mirth. It made a curious contrast, the exquisite melody soaring in liquid notes above coarse laughter and hoarse-voiced repartee.

Very quietly October slipped away. The arrival of the post-bag was my one excitement. I was content to have it so. On the last day of the month, however, something unexpected happened.

XXVII

That last day in October was Friday—a lovely day; not cold, but with just enough frost in the air to give it crispness. The morning ride had been lengthened out until Philip nearly lost his train, yet it had been all too short for me.

"It's a pity you must pass this perfect day in town," I said, as he lifted me from my saddle.

"I may be able to finish work in a couple of hours, child. If so, I shall return at once. The question now is, shall I catch this train?" and, laughing, he hurried away.

Madam was too much absorbed in the finishing of a new gown for me to care about the glory outside. Julie and Mathilde, harried by their task-mistress, worked with such a will that at noon they drew out the last basting-thread, with loud sighs of relief.

"*Vite, ma belle!*" cried Madam. "I die with anxiety to see thee in it. Julie, Mathilde, assist Mademoiselle! *Vite, vite, vite!*"

It was a pretty gown, of white serge, trimmed about throat and waist with swan's-down. The cut was severe, and a long cloak of the same serge—with a great hood like a nun's—was made to go with it. The moment I put it on Madam vowed she would go for an airing, and I must walk beside her in my new apparel. When we returned to the house she went to her room, while I, my morning duties over, sat down on the veranda steps to enjoy

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

the sunshine. I had hardly done so before I saw someone running toward me up the avenue. It proved to be a nephew of surly Pat's, a hobble-de-hoy of fifteen, who filled the old man's place at the lodge on the rare occasions of his absence. He came up at a steady trot, and, jerking the brim of his cap in salutation, said:

"A lady and gentleman at the gate to see you, Miss. They sez will you hurry, please."

Without waiting for an answer he turned and skurried away as rapidly as he had come. Wondering who my visitors could be I walked swiftly down the avenue. Mrs. Spuyten? Impossible. Since acknowledging my last check she had made no sign. Suddenly I thought of my Long Island friends, the Welborns. Had they come up to town for a few days sightseeing and remembered me? This pleasant idea turned my walk into a run, and bitter indeed was my disappointment when, upon passing through the gates into the high road, I was confronted by Mr. Von Schlange.

His flashy turnout, a high buggy drawn by two showily harnessed bays, was drawn up across the wide curve made by the gates with their flanking walls and pillars. Surly Pat's nephew stood by the horses' heads. In the buggy, the top of which was thrown back, sat a little fair-haired woman, in the gayest of costumes. Altogether this group, which met my eyes as I emerged from between the great pillars of the gateway, astonished me as much as might a cage of wild beasts introduced as an ornament in Madam's room. I stared without remembering to bow for a full minute, then bent my head slowly and coldly in acknowledgment of their unwelcome presence, and stood waiting to learn their errand.

The little person in the wagon was very pretty,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

and might have been still more so had her silks and velvets and immense cart-wheel hat—a style much in vogue that year—been of a less aggressive shade of blue. Her cheeks were very pink, her hair very yellow—a gay little figure in the brilliant sunshine of high noon! She returned my perhaps too steady gaze defiantly, yet seemed ill at ease, biting her lips or screwing them into different shapes. I saw that she was not a gentlewoman. Von Schlange stood dividing his glances between his companion and me, watching us with undisguised amusement, but giving no sign of having sent purposely for me. Weary of my strange position I said, icily:

“I see there has been a mistake in the delivering of your message to me, Mr. Von Schlange. It was probably intended for Mr. Erranti. I will let him know that you were here.”

I bowed, including the woman in my salute, and turned to re-enter the gate, but Mr. Von Schlange had found his tongue.

“One moment”—his tones were silky—“no mistake has been made. It was you, and you only, beautiful Miss—Dean?—whom I wished to see. I had a longing to bring about a meeting between the Past—and Present! Both charming—yet how different in face, figure, and—manner! My sole wonder is that a man who has taste enough to admire both styles——”

“Oh, do be quiet, Von Schlange,” the little woman cried out sharply. “I half believe you’ve fooled me after all!”

That I might see and hear better I pushed back the heavy cowl that hung about my face. It slipped off my braids, falling around my throat; yet clearer vision and hearing failed to help me understand Von Schlange’s words or his friend’s interruption. Veiled insult in his manner froze me into haughty

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

silence. It was for them to explain themselves. The woman, staring in an eager, questioning way, as if I possessed some secret which she longed to make her own, soon spoke again.

"I wish I hadn't come! Don't say anything more, Von Schlange, please. Let's get away back to town. Oh, do come!"

"Hold your tongue!" cried the man, roughly. "I swore I'd introduce you two, and, by God, I'll keep my word! Miss Dean—if that's the name you choose to go by——"

"Hush, hush, Von Schlange. Oh, do hush! You have made a mistake, and—someone is coming!"

He laughed insultingly.

"Pooh, pooh, my dear," looking insolently at me, although answering his companion. "Have you never seen a whitened sepulchre before? Come, then, let me——"

But the little woman had been right, someone was coming, nay, had come. Before he had time to finish his speech Philip galloped up, followed by his faithful henchman, Cray.

Philip's face was white under its tan—white with fury. He rushed his horse at Von Schlange, and, stooping from the saddle, seized him by the collar, dragged him a few yards distant from where I stood, slipped lightly to the ground without once relinquishing his iron grasp, raised his heavy riding-crop high in air and brought it down with tremendous force across Von Schlange's shoulders. Again and again it rose and fell with the regularity of a flail on the threshing-floor. Von Schlange, writhing under the heavy blows, cursed aloud in his anger. A strong man, broad, his neck like a bull's—his strength availed him nothing. Philip was as though possessed by a demon. His face ghastly, his tightly pressed lips flecked with foam, and eyes like burning

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

coals, he beat Von Schlange as though he would beat him to death.

Captain Kidd, riderless, affrighted by the sound of blows, trotted snorting through the open gate in the direction of the stables, Cray in pursuit. The horses before the buggy plunged and reared; the boy was too fully employed in holding them to interfere, even had he dared, in Von Schlange's behalf. The little fair woman, shrieking, wringing her hands, called to Philip in piteous accents to have mercy. Apparently he did not hear.

I stood quite still, watching the man who had nearly killed my mare experiencing the torture he had forced her—gentle, dumb creature—to undergo. I felt no pity, but a cold satisfaction in seeing justice administered. But for the fierce grip on his collar he would have fallen. Blood streamed from his face, which had been cut in several places. He groaned and panted from exhaustion, but Philip's strength and fury seemed undiminished.

The woman in the buggy cried to me for help. I did not answer. She sprang from the wagon and flung herself at my feet.

"Are you of stone?" she sobbed, clutching at my gown, clinging to it as she knelt. "Are you alive, that you stand by and see a man killed without a sound? Save him! Don't let Erranti murder him outright! I see he wronged you—he was a fool—blind! You are a lady—a beautiful, good, young lady, but don't let Erranti punish him to death! He's killing him now—a word from you would stop him. Have you no pity?"

I unfastened her fingers from my gown. She fell back, sobbing that she knew she was not fit to touch me, but that I was "Cruel! Cruel!"

"Get into the wagon," I said, gently. "Take the reins. You can drive?"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

She made a motion of assent and obeyed.

I went to Philip and caught the hand that held the whip. I am a very strong woman, but it took all my force to hold that hand for the instant that intervened before he saw who stood beside him.

"Enough!" I said. "Put him in his wagon and let him go."

Philip's tense features relaxed, the whip fell to the ground.

Lifting the helpless man in his arms he carried him to the buggy and flung him at the woman's feet. He neither looked at nor spoke to her, but calling to the boy to stand aside, drew back himself and watched the gay turnout whirl down the road and disappear. As the sound of its wheels died away a great silence fell. The sunshine dazzled down upon the trampled sweep of road, where lay a blood-stained riding-crop. The peaceful beauty of the October day was dead.

At last, with a fierce gesture of disgust, Philip, picking up the whip, flung it across the road into a splendid confusion of asters and goldenrod; then, striding up to the boy, who stood, open-mouthed, watching him, said, sternly:

"You young Judas, disgorge your ill-gotten gains!"

The lad, turning pale, strove to answer, but was tongue-tied by fear. Seizing him by the shoulder Philip shook him till his teeth chattered, crying out:

"How much for betraying your post, you young hound! Speak, or, by Heaven, I'll flay you alive!"

At this threat the boy turned his pockets inside out, and, finding his voice, whimpered that he "didn't get a cent!" that he thought the lady and gentleman friends of his master's, or Miss Dean's; that he wished he'd died afore he'd taken his uncle's place, even for an hour—with more to the same

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

effect. I was sorry for him. Philip, disbelieving him, threatened to turn him over to Surly Pat to be searched. Then, thrusting his hand into the bosom of his shirt, the terror-stricken creature drew out a crumpled mass of bills. Philip, smoothing them out, counted—ten dollars.

"You were well paid," he said, grimly. "Now place this money before that lady. At her feet, but not too near." Whitefaced, sullen, the boy obeyed. "Take these matches"—giving his silver match-box—"and light that dirty paper."

With trembling fingers the boy struck one and touched it to the desire of his greedy soul. The money caught fire, crackled gayly, shot up tiny tongues of flame, and shrivelled into ashes. Looking from his haggard face to the flecks of burned-out paper at my feet I realized that I had witnessed a tragedy.

"Beg Miss Derohan's pardon for the discomfort she has suffered through your fault," said Philip, imperiously.

The lad's pinched lips moved, but I heard no sound. Stooping, I laid my hand gently on his awkward shoulder.

"You did not mean to pain me, I am sure." I spoke very gently, for I pitied him. "I hope Mr. Erranti may not tell your uncle," and I asked Philip to pardon him then and there.

Poor, stupid, hobble-de-hoy! He burst into noisy blubbering, and, scrambling to his feet, slunk away into the lodge.

Philip smiled at me strangely.

"For your sweet sake I will keep his secret," he said. "Pat sha'n't hear of his bad faith—from me. Now, come home, Athena."

We left the sunny world outside the gates and entered the long aisle of shadows. I expected to

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

be questioned about the coming of Von Schlange, to be told the reason for Philip's furious onslaught. Instead he asked if I thought the boy had wept because his heart was touched by my kindness.

"No, indeed, Philip,"—I was surprised by his question—"because of the loss of his money."

"Why did you pity him, Athena? As a rule you don't sympathize with sinners. Mine was righteous wrath."

I pondered for a moment, only to discover I had no reason to give! The boy had seemed so forlorn in the pettiness of his mind and soul. Yet small meanness in a creature should not shield him!

"His punishment was so very severe," I said, at last. "He loved the money you forced him to burn."

Philip smiled.

"Oh, wise young judge, how I do honor thee! But I, were I brought to the bar when you were on the bench, might expect small mercy, I fear! Now Dick Thorpe, I'm told, has always run straight. I met his Thorpe uncle in town to-day, who paid him many compliments. I bring them home to you, dear child! They please you, praises of Thorpe, I'm sure. He's far more worthy of you than I could ever have been! Don't look so startled, Athena. I sha'n't make myself a nuisance on that subject, I promise; but just this once let me assure you that the day I place you in his care I sha'n't mind telling him that he's proved himself a better man than Philip Erranti!"

I listened in silence as he ran on in this strange, embarrassing fashion. He had apparently forgotten that he had, but a moment before, nearly beaten a man to death, and failed to notice that his shirt-front was spotted with blood. Neither did he observe that both his vest and short riding-coat were

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

unbuttoned and hanging loosely back. No, he strolled along by my side as though we were out for a morning walk, admired my new gown and cloak, commented on the charm of the day, and bade me notice what a fine bonfire we should have later when more leaves had fallen. It was only when, in sight of the house, he saw Randal on the veranda, that he asked me suddenly if Pat's nephew was present during my interview with Von Schlange.

"Yes."

"Did he hear what was said, Athena?"

"If he chose to listen."

"Thank you," said Philip; and in another moment was greeting Randal cordially, inviting him to luncheon.

"Thanks awfully, old chap!" said Randal, lounging down the steps to meet us. "Oh, I say, what's up? Gore on your manly bosom! Yet no blood in your eye! Your look as mild as a Baa, Baa, Black Sheep can look! What's he been a doin' of, Miss Derohan? The Saint George and Dragon act, in your honor? Come on, Macduff? I'll buckler thee agin a million—that sort of thing?"

"I cut my hand," said Philip shortly, running up the steps and into the house. "I'll be with you again directly."

"How sad!" drawled Randal, wagging his head. "Cut his poor dear hand! How careless of you, you giddy girl! You had oughter take care of that good little boy when he goes out day-day with you!" Then, suddenly dropping into his ordinary voice and manner, "That's about the biggest lie Erranti's ever got off on me. Will you tell me who he's been slaying this time? No, you won't? Then never mind. I'll find out for myself. Do you know, Miss Derohan, I can imagine you turning your pretty white thumb down, in the gladiator fights of old. You

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

belong to that period of the world's history. How you came alive again in this century I can't guess, but I'm sure some morning Erranti'll wake to find you a marble statue again!"

In the evening Philip asked if I felt any the worse for my disagreeable experience. Such a thing should never happen again—which I believed, knowing Von Schlange had no desire for death!

"I have heard all that took place before I rode up," said Philip, slowly. "I am at a loss to understand Von Schlange's motive in coming to see you. I can't imagine what he wanted—can you?"

His eyes were fixed upon me as though he wished to read my inmost thoughts. I spoke them aloud.

"Then why were you so angry?"

A dark red suffused his handsome face.

"I saw you felt insulted," he explained. "Von Schlange had no right to come here. I had forbidden him the house. I knew he was making himself obnoxious, and my temper rose."

"Did you know his friend?"

"No."

"She was a pretty little thing," I said, meaning no harm.

Philip sprang to his feet as though I had struck him.

"For God's sake, Athena, don't talk about her!"

He spoke with great violence. I was startled, and more perplexed than before.

"There, forgive me, child," he said, more quietly. "I confess that man's insolence has upset me completely. If you had but let me kill the viper outright I should be at ease. I can't bear to think that a thing so full of venom should be still alive!"

"Forget him," I said, soothingly. "Had you murdered him you would now be in hiding down cellar, while I provisioned the yacht for an ocean trip!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"You would do that for me, Athena?" he cried, eagerly. "You are enough my friend for that?"

"Of course," I said, smiling, amused by his serious way of taking my nonsense. "Madam and I would go, too."

"To Russia?" he asked, eying me strangely.

"Yes—for a good lawyer to defend you." I colored faintly.

"You will write him of this morning's affair, Athena?"

"No; why write unpleasant news?"

Philip, sighing as with relief, chose a book from the table and began to read to me. No more was said of Von Schlange's undiscovered mission.

XXVIII

That last day of October—so brilliantly beautiful—proved to be what the country folk call a “weather breeder.” It was followed by a long storm. November was a sullen month, with sad gray skies and constant drizzling rain. The wind moaned unceasingly through the dark trees; the gay, red leaves turned dull and sodden in their death on the chilling earth.

Madam no longer went out. The weather was too damp. Mr. Erranti did what he could to lighten her imprisonment by turning the veranda into a winter garden. Enclosed with glass, filled with palms, ferns, and flowering plants, with divans and easy-chairs ranged against the warm red of the brick walls, it became not only her garden, but a favorite lounging-place for Philip and his friends.

Heated by steam—as was the house—its atmosphere was that of a conservatory, and, being no hot-house plant, I needed all my strength to withstand its enervating effect. Often, suffocated by the airless luxury of my surroundings, I longed for the cold, draughty farmhouse on Long Island. Philip also insisted upon having double windows in the north rooms of the second and third story. Yielding to his fondness for rich tints, he had them made of colored glass, purple, pink, or yellow. Opaque, they shut out the view as well as the air; for, differing from any I had before seen, none had the usual single pane that will open for airing purposes. Mine were a pink barrier, filling my room with rosy light,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

but my view northward was gone. The two windows left free were overshadowed by the knoll which ran behind the house.

I missed my outlook toward Beverley Towers—missed the light that shone every evening from the windows of Mr. Beverley's library. I had liked to think of Richard's uncle ensconced before the fire, book in hand. A comfortable, neighborly glimmer of lamps in the early autumnal twilight, I had felt a friend was near. I even ventured to grumble a little to Philip, to regret my lost view, to mention the cheerful glow in the distance. He showed such pain at my disapproval of his arrangements for my "comfort"—as he called it—that I let the matter drop, resigning myself to the inevitable.

He was very kind in providing me with good maps on which I might follow Dick's journeyings, and brought me all the books on Russia—novels included—that he could find. The romances he read aloud. Often it was nearly midnight before I remembered to put away my embroidery and say "good-night!"

Since Dick's going he had shown a never-flagging interest in him and his affairs—so kindly an interest I wrote to Dick and told him, thinking it would set his fears at rest. Indeed, when a letter came the last week in October saying that Dick was just starting for a long trip northward—to visit an out-of-the-way estate belonging to his client—Philip startled me by an exclamation of alarm:

"How rash!"—then made matters worse by trying to mend them. "Don't look so frightened, child! I don't know what I meant, I'm sure. Travelling there is, doubtless, as safe as here. If winter should set in early—probably it won't this year—what harm can come to Mr. Thorpe in a well-warmed railway ear? I take one twice a day!" smiling reassuringly.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"But he writes he must, after leaving the train, travel some distance by carriage—or sledge."

"And your lovely little head is full of tales of wolves and such nonsense?" laughing at my fears. The laugh was, I knew, affected. "You foolish child, it's too early in the season for wolves to be hungry! Before winter has starved them into ferocity Mr. Thorpe will be safe and sound at home. Cheer up, Athena, and read me what I may hear of your letter."

"It's a very short one," I said, regretfully; "that is the only news in it. He is to write a longer one in the cars. He says it will reach me as soon as this!"

"Probably to-morrow—or next day. In the meantime don't worry over problematical accidents."

I succeeded in dismissing the anxiety his words had at first aroused, and waited for my letter with a tranquil heart. It did not come. I soon began to learn the sickness of heart that follows a hope deferred. Two weeks—two long weeks—dragged away! At first I believed the mails in fault; then, that the letter lay forgotten in the pocket of some careless servant; at last that Dick had met with some accident—or was very ill. The coming of the mail-bag was a daily torture; and when François, sorting its contents, murmured with an apologetic shrug of the shoulders, "Nothing for Mademoiselle to-day," I could hardly preserve my outward composure.

Philip, I knew, shared my fears, though he pretended to feel none, even making some plausible excuse for the non-coming of news; but when I confided to him my resolution of speaking to old Mr. Beverley when next I saw him at church, he highly approved.

"But for the fear of being meddlesome I should have done so myself," he said.

Just then, however, one of the horses fell ill. It

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

was thought to be a case of glanders, and because of the contagious nature of the disease I was not allowed to ride or drive. A wholly unnecessary precaution, I thought. The sick horse was quarantined, the others perfectly well. Philip used them as usual, and on Sunday the servants were sent to church. When I pointed this out to Philip he laughed at himself for being, perhaps, over-careful, but would not yield his point.

"It is a very deceitful disease, Athena," he persisted. "The best vet can't always be sure a horse isn't developing it. As contagious, too, as the measles. Dogs can't catch it, they say, so I don't forbid Don the stables."

"I doubt if 'Jim Crow' really has it," I hazarded, being an obstinate person. "You know you are not sure, Philip."

At this he looked very grave.

"My dear little woman," he said, "you must let me judge for you in this matter. I am answerable to Mr. Thorpe for your health and safety. During his absence I run no risks."

So I remained shut in behind the high walls of the park. Philip never remembered to make the inquiries for me, and was so uncomfortable when reminded of his forgetfulness I disliked speaking to him on the subject. Pride forbade my asking Randal about Richard. I dreaded his slow, contemptuous smile, his sneering drawl. Often, too, I caught him watching me stealthily. Sometimes I wondered if he had guessed my relationship to his cousin and was enjoying hiding ill-tidings from me. Never, in his long chats with Madam, did he mention Richard's name, and she seemed glad to have him forgotten. Nemesis still flashed upon Randal's hand, so I knew he had kept the secret of his gambling from Mr. Beverley. He lost so constantly, so

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

heavily, that I wondered where he got the money with which to play, for debts of honor must be paid.

November crawled slowly away. Philip had begun to treat me with the air of tender pity one shows to a wounded creature. The servants were subdued in manner when they waited upon me, as if awed by the secret knowledge of some great misfortune. Madam alone was the same as ever—kind and affectionate, peevish and selfish by turn. I kept my trouble from passing the threshold of her door. I was accustomed to suffering alone. I would do so to the end, please God.

“How thin thou art growing, my child,” said Madam, “how very thin! It is not unbecoming—no, making thee look more spiritual even than before. Still, I like it not! Yesterday, when all ate so much, so much—on Thanksgiving Day all are pigs, Athena—thou didst eat nothing! Oh, I saw! And Philip, he was anxious. He said nothing, but he noticed! It is the weather. How may one have appetite in this eternal gloom? To-day is the last of this hateful month of rain. I am glad. It does well to end with a Friday. The last day of unlucky weather let us hope!”

“December may enter gayly,” I said. “The sun may shine to-morrow, dear Madam.”

“Did we read those hateful newspapers, you and I, we should know their guess-work for to-morrow! Better not. We have too much sense; I have, that is, for thou art dull, Athena, to read their sheets of horror. Dreadful murders, horrid accidents—how now, child? Thy face flushes strangely—thou art not ill, *ma bien-aimée*?”

I was not ill. Well might she call me dull. Never once had I thought to search the papers for news of Dick. Had an accident occurred, one of

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

serious import, they would tell me. I could hardly wait for my hour of freedom. When it came I hurried to the library, where I knew I should find the back numbers of Philip's favorite newspaper for the month. He kept them on file for reference. But they were not in their usual place. I hunted everywhere; I could not find them. François, whom I called to assist me, pretended to know nothing of their whereabouts.

"Monsieur always keeps them here." I showed the place. "Surely you must remember, François?"

"But yes, Mademoiselle, quite well."

"Then what has become of them?"

"I do not know, Mademoiselle."

"Please search in Monsieur's room," I said. "I will look elsewhere myself."

During my search I met Mathilde, and asked her if she had seen them.

"But no, Mademoiselle," she said, in her usual stolid way.

"I mean the file of newspapers Monsieur keeps in the library."

"Ah, those, Mademoiselle? They were burned."

"Burned?" I echoed, despairingly. "Oh, Mathilde!"

"I regret it, since Mademoiselle desires them," she said, politely.

"Why were they burned, Mathilde?"

"I do not know. Monsieur gave the order." Then, seeing François approaching, she added, so that he might hear, "François destroyed them."

"Great idiot!" hissed the man between his teeth. "But Monsieur shall hear of thy folly!"

I went swiftly away from the two. I was cold with terror. Must I feel the icy hand of Death upon my heart again? I would go at once to Mr. Beverley. He should tell me what the others con-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ceased. Their ill-judged kindness was driving me mad.

The day was very dreary. The first snow of the winter had come. Great wet flakes fell, sadly, unwillingly, as though aware they left Heaven for a death-bed on the sodden Earth. Most of them melted as they touched the ground; but so many followed, and for so long, that by and by enough remained to give the world the appearance of being wrapped in a dirty shroud. Not until I was ready to start on my pilgrimage—late in the afternoon—did I recollect that the door in the wall was locked and that François had the key. When I rang for him and asked for it, he vowed he had mislaid it. Pretending despair over his carelessness, he overwhelmed himself with bitter denunciations.

"A pig! An imbecile!" he cried, flinging out his arms. "I detest myself for my stupidity! Wait, dear Mademoiselle, till Monsieur returns. Monsieur has duplicate keys of everything, as Mademoiselle knows. See, it is already five o'clock. At six Monsieur returns. But one little hour to wait!"

Since François refused me I knew there would be the same result if I applied to Surly Pat. "One little hour!" as François had said. After a month of waiting surely I might endure that long. But at six there came only a telegram. Philip would return at nine, bringing a party of friends. I schooled myself to wait quietly until then, endeavoring to follow the routine of living, as usual. After all, I might only be imagining Giants of Despair. Philip might have good news for me—at last.

"The dinner does not please Mademoiselle?"

I was at table, but could not eat.

"An excellent dinner, François."

"A spoonful of soup! A morsel of bread! And Mademoiselle says the dinner pleases! But that is

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

impossible!" He flung out both hands in a gesture of disapproval and despair.

"I am not hungry, François."

"And Monsieur? What shall I say when he inquires? Every evening it is, 'Did Mlle. Derohan eat a good luncheon, François?' Of late it is always, 'No, Monsieur!' that I must say. Monsieur then grows angry. He swears I am a fool, a pig of a Frenchman! That I will do well to select a menu more to Mademoiselle's taste—else, he will do me harm!"

"I will tell Monsieur that the fault is with my lack of appetite, François."

He shook his head, unappeased.

"An angry man—*mais, que voulez-vous?* He is enraged. I, François, am near. *Voilà tout!*"

At eight o'clock I heard someone stamping the snow from his boots on the veranda steps. Looking from Madam's private door I saw François admit Randal St. John. Madam bade me entertain him until Philip came home. She was tired and wished to go to bed. I would gladly have avoided seeing him, but Madam was not to be disobeyed. I went to meet him along the veranda, through whose glass wall I could see the whitened avenue and the swirl of descending snowflakes. Randal was covered with snow, and as I approached nearer, stepping softly on the thick rugs under the palm trees, I thought his face rivalled it in whiteness. François's shifty eyes saw me first. As he helped Randal remove his coat he whispered something cautiously. Randal started, looked up hastily. Our eyes met. The expression in his startled me. Was it—fear? Then he smiled, advancing to greet me with outstretched hand, but his eyes avoided mine.

"May I speak to you alone, Miss Derohan? I have come on purpose through all this storm."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Without a word I led him toward the library, but, stopping me with a gesture of dissent, we turned into the drawing-room. This room, with its "*rouge et noir*" table, was in readiness for Philip and his guests. A fire glowed in the grate, and many lamps were lighted. I motioned Randal to be seated. I had no words at my command. His expression told me the nature of his errand. He did not sit down, and I, standing by the green table, laid my hand on it for support. What cruel turn was Fortune about to play me in the awful game of chance called Life?

A long silence fell between us. It seemed impossible for the pale young man standing facing me to speak. He moistened his dry lips in vain. In the midst of my own agony I felt pity for him, made a great effort, and broke the silence myself.

"I am sorry you must go through this for me. You bring bad news of—your cousin?"

"Yes."

His face was ashen, his lips twitched, his eyes wandered everywhere, avoiding mine. I waited. A long moment dragged slowly past. I could endure no longer. I begged him to tell all.

"Don't keep me in suspense," I pleaded. "I am strong—I can bear anything save that. He is ill? He is—dead? Oh, for God's sake, speak!"

"There has been an accident—" Again he moistened his lips. He spoke hoarsely, as if his throat, too, were dry. "I guessed long ago, Miss Derohan, how things were between—between my—my cousin and you. I thought you ought to be told. Erranti refused—said I must do it. I only knew two weeks ago—only became sure then, I mean. A cable announced it early in the month. Good God! don't look at me like that!"

He covered his eyes with his hand.

"Don't torture me—he is dead?"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Yes," was the fierce answer, " he is. No doubt left. We have had the account verified. He was travelling in a carriage—or sledge—I forget which. They had to cross a river—they thought the ice thick enough to bear them. It proved too thin—the whole affair broke through. They say his body can't be recovered till spring—perhaps not then——"

His pitiless words seemed to come from a great distance. A black mist swung up and down before my eyes. Through it I saw the walls of the room retreating suddenly, and, as suddenly, closing in upon me where I stood. A sound as of the roaring of a cataract filled my ears—the air grew hot to suffocation. My numbed brain held but one idea—I must somehow reach my room and be alone. The door seemed very far away. Randal, hastening to open it for me, was speaking, for his lips moved; but because of the strange noise that filled all space I did not hear his words. I had difficulty in crossing the hall. It had widened unaccountably; the staircase, leaning forward over me, was hard to climb; but I reached my room at last, bolted the door with clumsy, slow fingers, and turning away fell heavily upon the floor, dead, for a time, to the misery of my narrowed life.

When I regained consciousness, returning with deep sighs and a sensation of sickness to a knowledge of what was going on about me, my first thought was of my failure to gain solitude. It was with despair that I found Julie's dark face close above mine. Thinking aloud, I said:

"I bolted the door!"

"She is herself again, Monsieur. You may return to *ces messieurs* without delay. Have no fear—all is well."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Philip, anxious, alarmed, was standing at the foot of the lounge upon which they had placed me. My face and throat were wet and cold from the water they had used too plentifully. There was a strong smell of aromatic vinegar in the air. Another moment and Philip, motioning Julie aside, had lifted me deftly from my pillows and held a wine-glass to my lips. I stared dully at him, wondering. Then, with a sharp pang, I remembered. I tried to push him away, begging to be left alone.

"I bolted the door," I wailed. "Oh, how did you get in!"

"It was ajar, my pet," he spoke soothingly, caressingly. "I will go when you have taken this. There, drink it quickly, my darling, my Athena, my own poor child, and no one shall worry you longer."

In desperate haste to be rid of my tormentors I drained the glass. The liquid had a stale, sweet taste, most unpleasant to me; but it was not long before I fell under the influence of the drug and slept. When I woke, in the early dawn, Julie was still beside me.

"I am here instead of your own maid, Mademoiselle," she said, "because of an accident. Mathilde fears Mademoiselle's anger, she says. An accident truly, but of a stupidity difficult to comprehend! To save the cross of pearls from the water, with which we were obliged to revive Mademoiselle, I ventured to remove it. In her desire to be of use, nervous through anxiety, Mathilde grew clumsy—yes, I grieve to tell it, she dropped and trod upon the pearls! Then, fearing Mademoiselle's wrath, she gathered up hastily chain and all and—poor foolish one—sought to conceal her misfortune by burning what remained. Yes, Mademoiselle, in the kitchen range!"

I sent her my forgiveness, promising to keep the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

affair a secret. If she felt regret she showed none, and a few days later was guilty of another piece of carelessness that cost me dear. In lighting my lamps she set fire to the window-curtain near my desk. François, running to help, wrenched off the top of the desk to save my valuables! Seeing nothing save a bundle of letters he left them, and turned his attention at last to the curtain. Bits of the burning lace dropped into the open desk, and Richard's letters were destroyed. I had nothing left.

Dear little Madam. Had she been my mother she could not have shown me greater sympathy in the sad months which followed. I hope I was all to her that a daughter might have been. I know I loved her dearly. Philip did his best—in his way—to console me, to teach me to forget. He could not know that this lesson was one impossible for me to learn. Mr. Beverley ignored me. No word of sympathy came from Beverley Towers, no mention of the sealed letter was made. If Dick had left one in his uncle's keeping he made no sign. I wished to write and inquire, but Philip hinting—very delicately—that its contents probably related to money, my pride arose and I kept silence. Then I learned that Mr. Beverley, with Randal as companion, had gone South for the winter.

XXIX

January and February were gone. March, with its promise of spring, had brought weather worthy of mid-winter, coming in "like a lion," with a roaring storm. On Saturday and Sunday snow fell, keeping the crowd of men at the Hall at their cards most of the time. Sunday evening it changed to rain and hail, and we awoke on Monday to find ourselves in Fairyland, the trees in an armor of ice, the snow coated with a shimmering crust. Masses of gray vapor scudded across the sky, through whose great rents the sun shone brightly now and again. I watched with eager delight this varying sunshine and shadow on woods transformed into a forest of translucent crystals.

"My hat and coat, please, Mathilde," I said, as I went down to breakfast. "I want to get out as soon as possible. The gentlemen left on the early train, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Not Monsieur. The English Monsieur also remains. He is not well."

I hesitated, wondering if I had best breakfast in my room.

"He is in bed, the English Monsieur," said Mathilde, reassuringly. "Mademoiselle may descend without fear."

"And Cray?" I asked, remembering he had been indisposed since Friday night. "How is Cray?"

"The same, Mademoiselle. He strove to rise this morning, but fell back, quite giddy. Monsieur is much annoyed."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Philip was careless of his servants' comfort. I thought Cray hardly used, and determined to say so.

"Well, my Princess!" cried Philip, coming to meet me as I entered the dining-room. "Are you pleased with the toilet Dame Nature has made in your honor? Ah, but you rival her, in that shimmering, glistening gown! Watered silk, you call it? It is charming! You have your wraps—a walk after breakfast?"

"Yes," I said, smiling at his notice of my finery. "I want to look up at the sky through these ice-branches."

"Before the sun has had time to melt them? So you shall, my child! The avenue will be good enough under foot. I will go with you."

"Aren't you going to town?" I asked, surprised.

"How can I, with that man ill upstairs? I don't believe there's much the matter, but I don't like to leave him alone all day. I shall go to Droneton directly after breakfast to do some telegraphing." He laughed, adding, "I expect to find the station full of the fools who would start for the early train. The rails must be in a frightful condition under this load of ice."

"And Cray, Philip, how is he?"

"I don't know," frowning. "I can't imagine what lazy devil has entered into him! He's apparently no more sick than I; but when I order him to get up he turns green, and shakes as if with ague. Julie is really frightened. She treats my suggestion that he's only shamming with horror—as if I were a monster of inhumanity. The deuce is in the pair of them, and a precious pair they are!"

"I'll run in for a look at him by and by."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Athena," cried Philip, in alarm. "I positively forbid it! The fool may have caught some contagious disease—or he

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

about to fall ill of a fever! There, I don't mean to speak harshly, my pet, but pray keep with *maman*. Leave Cray to his wife's care."

"Very well, Philip," I said, obediently, unwilling to worry him.

He looked pleased, and the expression in his eyes troubled me, reminding me of the time when he had imagined himself in love with me. Although I felt assured that he would never wish to be more than a true friend to me, I disliked the remembrance of the past, and, to change the trend of my thoughts, inquired about the Englishman. I was obliged to repeat my question three times before I got an answer.

"Is the Englishman to have a doctor, Philip?"

"A doctor? A doctor?" he repeated, dreamily; then, rousing himself, "No, no. What are you thinking of—what should Mr. Percy want of a doctor? I suppose he has headache because he lost a pot of money last night! Don't look so stern, my Queen, I didn't win his money! There, since you have finished, let's start on our walk. The sleigh can meet me at the gate."

He helped me into the magnificent coat of silk, reaching to the hem of my gown, with its great collar and cuffs of ermine and diamond clasp, Madam's latest folly. Since Richard's death I had made no effort to check her extravagance. It made her happy to see me clad in splendor. It could annoy no one. To please her had become the object of my life.

The avenue was even more beautiful than I had expected, with its arched ceiling of crystal lace-work. Under foot the fallen icicles crackled gayly.

"You might pass for the Snow Queen inspecting her Kingdom," said Philip, as we strolled along, slowly, because of the beauty. "Don, at a pinch, might do for your Polar Bear."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Don had developed into a dignified person, only occasionally reverting to the ways of puppyhood. He was a jealous dog. I came first in his affections, and he liked to walk by my side alone. This he now showed by striving to oust Philip, shoving his great head and shoulders between us, and, when Philip, yielding the coveted position, changed to my other side, following and repeating the same tactics there. Philip at last complained.

"Will you let me give that brute the beating he so richly deserves, Athena?" I was surprised at the anger in his voice. "He belongs to you, so I sha'n't touch him if you say not, but he's very annoying."

"This is news to me," I said, smiling. "When did you give Don to me, pray?"

"Nonsense, child, you know perfectly well he is yours. The most jealous brute I ever saw! You spoil him outrageously, Athena."

I did not want Don beaten, and I saw that Philip, strangely enough, was furious. Slipping my handkerchief under the dog's collar I kept him on the side he had last usurped, and strove to make peace.

"Now, Philip," I said, serenely, "I may walk between my two best protectors! Don, remember, takes care of me every day when you are not here. Have patience with him. He feels his own importance a little too much, like all children who are intrusted with what they believe to be of high value."

Philip laughed, but there was no merriment in his laughter.

"A strange child you are, Athena! So simple a baby could see through you, yet" — he looked earnestly at me for a moment — "do you know that your eyes are not unlike ice? Certainly as cold and — look there," placing his hand on my arm so that I stood still. "See that long icicle in the shadow

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

yonder? Quite gray, yet shining—yes, it is like your eyes.”

The comparison did not please me, but I refrained from saying so.

“Emeralds would suit your eyes,” he continued. “When you wear colors you must have some.”

He spoke as if I were to remain forever with Madam—with Madam, who was fading day by day—with Madam, to whom the doctor gave but a few months of life! In my intoxication over the ice-storm’s beauty my cares had been forgotten. At Philip’s words they all came fluttering back.

The sleigh was waiting outside the gates. Philip begged me to start homeward before they were opened.

“I am sorry I was cross about Don,” he said, patting the dog’s head. “Guard her well, old chap! You’re right to distrust everybody where she is concerned—the Treasure of Highgrove Hall!”

I had become so accustomed to his flowers of speech I scarcely noticed them. They no longer provoked my indignation or mirth. I had long since realized that they meant nothing. It was only “Philip’s way,” as Madam said.

I wanted to see the world outside the gates, for the first time in months. Philip divined the meaning of my wistful glances.

“I wish I might take you, pet,” he said, “but I’ve no idea how long I’ll be gone. It would never do to leave you waiting in those forlorn Droneton streets, and I shouldn’t have any head for business knowing you were freezing there. I’m terribly sorry.”

“It doesn’t matter in the least, Philip,” I said, regretting I had not better concealed my thoughts. “I fancied for a moment that I should like a peep at the frozen meadows, but only for a moment. I really prefer remaining at home.”

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

He stood still, his hand on the great knob of the gate, looking at me intently, oddly.

"Have patience, Athena," he smiled strangely as he spoke, "a little patience. A little longer, and you shall have everything that you wish."

Surly Pat, who had no patience, here gave the bar of the gate a vicious pull, and Philip, waving an adieu, passed out. Don and I turned back into the avenue, he, well content to be my only companion, I, once more childishly fascinated by my fairyland. As we reached a bend in the road where the view forward was cut off, the sun came out and we were as if in the centre of a rainbow. Philip had spoken of emeralds. Here they were, and gems of every tint! Suddenly I thought of my mother. How beautiful she had been in the splendor of her emeralds——

A low growl from Don roused me to a remembrance of the present. A man had appeared around the bend and was nearing us rapidly. Dazzled by long staring at the glitter about me I saw only that the person was of medium height and very broad-shouldered. Don, recognizing in him a member of his master's last house-party, ceased growling and became indifferent.

"So it is Athena Derohan!" said a well-modulated but unpleasant voice. "I knew there could not be two such faces in the world. I am glad I waited and—made sure."

It was Lord Ebbrides.

I stood quite still—a frozen woman in a frozen world.

"Is this my welcome, Athena? Aren't you glad to see an old friend?"

An old friend! I thought of my father. An old friend! I should do well to hold my peace. Did I speak, my lips might reveal too clearly the deadly

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

hatred that filled my heart. Out of respect to the dead let me keep silence.

"Why don't you speak, Athena? There's no one with me—I am quite alone. I go by the name of Percy here. These Yankees make such an infernal to-do about a title. Percy's my family name, as you know, so I've a right to it. Percy Stuart was my cousin—his mother was a Percy. You remember Percy Stuart?"

He was growing uneasy under my steady gaze. He looked just the same, save for a few wrinkles—odd, fine little wrinkles, marring the perfection of his still exquisite complexion. Why had he spoken of Percy Stuart? How dared he drag back the past?

"Perhaps you'd have preferred not to meet your father's old friend, in your present position!" A new tone was in his voice, he looked at me strangely. "What does this rich dress mean, Athena? Not that you are the wife of this Erranti, I hope! Perhaps you are about to marry him, perhaps—" He stepped forward, placing his hand on my arm. Don, snuffing rabbit-tracks in the underbrush, did not see the stranger's familiarity. "You remind me of your mother"—his face was suddenly gray, old-looking—"I am loath to think—Athena," speaking sharply, "as a child you were always truthful, often unpleasantly so. In God's name, what are you doing here?"

I had conquered myself, had repressed, forced back the anger in my heart. I was a *de Rohan*. Let me behave as my mother and father would approve. Passionate vituperation, revilings, reproaches, were not for the lips of their daughter. Lord Ebbrides must never know how bitter had been the loss of his friendship. I found my voice and answered him.

"Pardon my too evident surprise at seeing you, Lord Ebbrides. I fear it has made me rude. I am

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Madam Erranti's companion. You are fortunate in being here during this ice-carnival. Are not these trees surpassingly lovely?"

Releasing my arm he drew back a pace, and, taking out his handkerchief, passed it over his forehead. He was strangely agitated, not noticing my remark about the landscape, but saying, rather to himself than to me:

"I'm thankful I am in time."

I waited a moment, then called Don. I hoped our interview was over, but it had only begun.

"Where are you going? Back to the house? Not yet, please. I've much to say and should prefer to say it here. Ah! I thought so! Here comes that crooked-eyed fellow, hot foot on my trail!"

Around the bend came François, his sallow face red, his breath coming quickly. He had been running.

"Jailbird!" muttered Lord Ebbrides. Then, very sharply, "Well, my man, what do you want?"

Explaining that he understood only French, I repeated the question.

"The cane of Monsieur," said François, looking very sheepish. "I thought because of the ice——"

"And Monsieur's great age," broke in Lord Ebbrides, ironically. "Well, give it to me. Why hold it behind your back? That Mademoiselle Derohan may not see you've brought one of your master's?"

François, grinning in sickly fashion, unwillingly produced an old stick of Philip's. I looked on, amazed.

"Mademoiselle is shocked by this evidence of your duplicity, but you see I'm not," continued François's tormentor. "I'll not only reward you"—giving him money—"but use the cane to lean upon instead of laying it across your shoulders. Walk slowly behind us, please, to the house. Plenty of time then

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

to telephone your master that the ill gentleman is up—and with Mademoiselle Derohan!”

François, looking like a whipped hound, obeyed.

“Can I see you alone in the house, Athena?”—we were walking swiftly homeward. “Can you obtain an hour’s liberty? I hear you are under constant *surveillance*.”

“That is not true,” I said, proudly. “Where did you hear such false nonsense?”

I was indignant with his manner toward me. He took it for granted that I was his friend.

“Everybody knows more about you than yourself, it seems. I grant that some mistakes with regard to your position here are made. They are annoying, but perfectly natural ones.” We had reached the house. “You’re certain you can give me an hour—and you will?”

“Yes, I can and will.”

He stooped, touching the hem of my skirt with white, ungloved fingers.

“This is damp. Pray change it. If you have a plain gown in your wardrobe, for Heaven’s sake put it on.” He took out his watch. “I shall wait for you in the library. It’s now a little after half-past nine. If you don’t rejoin me at ten—I’ll come to find you.”

I bowed and left him, going to ask Madam for the hour he demanded. Glancing back I saw him standing staring at François, a malevolent smile lighting up his coarse features in amusement over the man’s bitter discomfiture.

I was troubled by finding Madam still in bed heavy with sleep. Julie stood by the glass veranda door, which was closed, the rose-colored shade drawn down. When I entered she had one corner of this shade in her hand and was peeping out cautiously, as if fearful of being discovered. Hearing me she

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

dropped it, turning a frightened, haggard face. Relieved when she saw who it was, she came swiftly forward, her finger on her lips.

"Hush!" she whispered. "Madame has had a bad night. She may sleep now. Come away, Mademoiselle." She drew me into the corridor, closing the door of Madam's room noiselessly behind us. I stared in surprise. What was coming?

"Mademoiselle," she continued, in the same hoarse whisper, "you go to talk with milord?"

"Lord Ebbrides? Then you recognized him? Yes."

"If I have recognized him!" she exclaimed, striking her hands together, but softly. "*Dieu de Dieu!*"

Her agitation was intense, but she never for one moment forgot Madam, and it was the more impressive from being so violently repressed. Sorry for her distress, I begged her to tell me what was the matter.

"I may be able to help you, Julie."

"I was faithful to Mademoiselle's mother," she said, piteously. "I never gave her cause to complain."

"That is true, Julie. You served my mother well. What is it you wish?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle! Don't let him know that I—that Cray is here! Don't tell him, Mademoiselle, I beg, I implore."

She was down upon her knees at my feet. I looked at her steadily. She hid her face in the folds of my dress. I wondered why she feared Lord Ebbrides—if it were because of his coming that Cray had fallen ill? But Julie had been a faithful servant, Lord Ebbrides a faithless friend. Instinctively I ranged myself on her side.

"I promise not to tell him, Julie. Don't be afraid. You have my word."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

She rose lightly to her feet, calm, composed, hard-looking. Her handsome face was haggard and lined, but it wore its accustomed mask.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," she said, quietly. "I know I can rely on your word," and glided back silently into Madam's room.

In obedience to Lord Ebbrides's wish—one I understood—I put on my simplest gown, the white serge edged with swan's-down. When I entered the library I found he had closed the windows—generally open because of the veranda being enclosed—and he shut the door immediately behind me.

"We must expect eavesdroppers," he remarked, composedly; "but there's no need of making things too easy for them."

He placed a chair for me well away from key-holes, scrutinizing me closely as he did so.

"Ah! now you look like the little Athena who used to run away from me in the old days—yet you have changed. From a beautiful child you have grown into a marvellously beautiful woman! You are strangely like, yet unlike, both your parents." He stood still for a moment, his eyes riveted upon me, then said, his lips twitching oddly, "Your mother used to predict that you would rival her some day. To the eyes of the world you might now appear lovelier. To mine——"

He turned away and began nervously to rearrange the books on a table at his elbow. I wondered why he desired an interview that evidently gave him pain. With a deep sigh he broke the long silence that had fallen.

"I fancy," he said, slowly, "that you are one of the most beautiful of living women."

"It may be, Lord Ebbrides. Not that it matters much. Was that what you wished to say to me?"

"Do you mean that you take no interest in your

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

beauty, Athena? No, I see you don't—but you were always strange, as a child. No; what I have to say is this. I heard of Charles Derohan's death only six short weeks ago. I knew you to be poor, and alone in the world. I started to find you—to fetch you home. I came to New York. After some trouble I was sent to a most disagreeable woman, Mrs. —” he hesitated.

“Spuyten?”

“Yes. A cousin of your father's, I understand. She said she heard you had gone to California——”

“To California?” I exclaimed. “How absurd! She must have known better.”

“Very probably. A spiteful old hag, from appearances. I decided to follow, to look you up there.”

“California is a very large State, Lord Ebbrides.”

“It's not easy for a beautiful woman to escape observation, Athena. Your style of beauty is so very remarkable you may never hope to pass unnoticed. It is exquisite. It is rare.”

He harped upon my appearance with an offensive persistency, as if he took a personal pride in my looks.

“How came you here?” I asked, hoping to change the subject.

“The merest chance! A vulgar beast from San Francisco, whom I was told I might find useful, suggested my coming here for the play to be had. I'd nothing to do, so came. My valet told me of the presence of a mysterious beauty in the house—kept under lock and key. What I heard roused my suspicions—‘a golden-haired statue.’ On Sunday I caught a glimpse of you. That was enough. I feigned illness, an excuse for remaining, and don't need to seek you in California.”

He was again silent. I thought I heard an odd

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

sound, as of hoarse breathing, at the door. Lord Ebbrides, moving swiftly across the room, flung it wide, and François fell in upon his knees!

"Ah! The individual who is supposed not to understand English, Athena!" said Lord Ebbrides, calmly. "Pick yourself up, my man, and go clean the plate. You may be a good butler. You are a wretched spy."

François, stumbling to his feet, sneaked away.

"Next we shall have the master, Athena! Well, it doesn't matter how soon he comes now, for this last episode must convince you that the sooner you're out of this house the better. Now pay attention, for what I am about to say is of importance. I have come, as I said, to take you home. I intend to make you my wife. Yes," as I stared in embarrassment, "no doubt you are surprised. I know I'm not supposed to be a marrying man. My heir, a detestable prig, is making cock-sure of stepping into my shoes. He'll make a wry face when he hears of the lovely new viscountess! The ceremony had better take place at once—say in New York, to-morrow morning, unless you can suggest a better arrangement."

He looked inquiringly at me as he finished this extraordinary speech; but, dumb with amazement, I found no words at my command. This silence was misinterpreted.

"I don't wonder at your surprise, my dear. As far as money goes of course I might do better, but I've enough of that. What I want is a young, well-born woman, who is both beautiful and good. You fill these requirements. You never were a very interesting child as far as saying bright things goes, but you were, if slow, very good. I couldn't endure a flirting wife, and you won't trouble me in that way."

I made haste to answer, rising as I spoke.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I am sensible of the honor you do me, Lord Ebbrides, but I cannot be your wife."

Astonishment now stayed Lord Ebbrides's speech. At last, in a hard voice, he asked my reason for declining his offer.

"I prefer not to marry."

"Stuff! That's no reason."

"I don't care for you, Lord Ebbrides."

He burst into a harsh laugh.

"What rot you are talking!" he exclaimed. "Have I asked you to care for me, pray? Do I pretend to be romantically in love with you? Listen. Try to understand. I want a wife. I can give her a good old name, wealth—you shall have nothing to complain of in the matter of settlements—a high position in England. I ask you to accept these advantages. Surely you won't be mad enough to refuse?"

"Yes, I refuse. I can't understand why you wish to marry me. You never even liked me, Lord Ebbrides."

"You remind me of the happiest time in my life—and I can't have Athena Derohan a pauper."

"Doubtless you mean to be kind," I said, wearily, very tired of it all, "so I thank you. Pray say no more about it, Lord Ebbrides. I can't do as you wish."

"Nonsense! I can't allow you to behave so foolishly! Why, child, you shall have your mother's emeralds to wear at court."

"I thought they were stolen."

"So they were," he said, frowning angrily, "and put back afterward! All save one large emerald, square, with a nick in one corner—your mother wore it as a brooch; you remember it?"

I remembered it well, also its double, set in a dagger's hilt, in Philip's desk close at hand,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"That brooch, Athena, was traced to a pawnbroker's, but it had been sold. The clerk who received and disposed of it took French leave—probably was guilty of other thievish business. The pawnbroker proved to be an honest man."

"You suspected no one?"

"No, I didn't suspect. I knew who took the jewels."

"Who?" I asked, breathlessly.

"A valet I had had for years—stay, he married Julie, your mother's maid—Anthony Cray. I couldn't prove anything against either of them, however. They were too sharp for me. They took them, and, afraid to keep them, put them back. The nicked emerald, the clue needed, was not to be found. I sent them packing—more I couldn't do. They went to Australia, I believe."

Had I become the confederate of criminals? I felt so, because of my promise given Julie. As for the emerald in Philip's stiletto, that must be but a chance resemblance—one of the odd doubles of which the world is full.

"Because the brooch is gone you look as depressed as if I'd lost the whole collection, Athena! Come, my dear, there are plenty left for you to shine in! The Ebbrides diamonds are being reset for you, too. I attended to that before I sailed. Now, run upstairs and pack your things. I expect I shall grow very fond of you in time—run along and get ready."

"May I ask," said an icy voice behind him, "if Mr. Percy has done well to leave his bed? It is taking a great risk in this cold weather—for so ill a man."

It was Philip. He had entered unseen. How much of the foregoing conversation he had heard I could not know, but enough to rouse his anger. Even his lips were ashen, and the steely glitter in

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

his eyes augured ill for Lord Ebbrides. To my surprise he was as angry, apparently, as Philip. The two men faced each other like furious wild beasts about to spring at each other's throats. I stepped quickly forward, as if to greet Philip, really to place myself between them.

"What lovely lilies, Philip." He held a sheaf of callas on one arm. "You got them in Droneton?"

He gave them to me without a word. Lord Ebbrides had his entire attention.

"Go upstairs, Athena, and get ready," said Lord Ebbrides, turning to me. "I will explain to Mr. Erranti all that is necessary he should know. Go, my dear."

Philip, his face set like iron, moved between me and the door. I was annoyed that Lord Ebbrides persisted in misunderstanding me, that he forced me to speak my mind before Philip. Yet it had to be.

"Lord Ebbrides—" I began.

"Ah! Lord Ebbrides!" interrupted Philip. "I understood it was Mr. Percy whom I had the honor to entertain beneath my poor roof." He laughed contemptuously, as in disdain of the deceit practiced.

"You are quite right," said his guest, coldly, "it is an honor I have done you. I have paid well for my entertainment, as you call it, paid to the tune of a thousand pounds."

"Oh, hush, pray!" I entreated. "Of what use to quarrel? The money is gone, Lord Ebbrides——"

"Yes, into his pocket," muttered that nobleman.

"Remember, Philip," I continued, "you are in your own house!"

"I begin to doubt it," he said, fiercely.

"Pray let me speak," I begged. "There has been a mistake, I am sure. Lord Ebbrides, I must say good-bye! I thank you for all you have wished to do for me. Please leave here at once, and forget

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Athena Derohan." I held out my hand—I felt I must be civil enough to shake hands with him—and said to Philip, "Please order a trap to take Lord Ebbrides to his train."

A flush of pleasure swept the pallor from Philip's face. He looked triumphantly at Lord Ebbrides, but his voice was quite gentle as he said:

"You hear Miss Derohan's decision, sir. She remains with me."

"She shall do no such thing!" said Lord Ebbrides, hotly. "Do you know what this man is, Athena, under whose roof you are mad enough to wish to stay? A common adventurer, the keeper of a gambling hell——"

"You lie!" cried Philip, fiercely. "Don't listen to him, Athena!"

"I am your father's chosen friend—I was his closest friend. I claim the right, as such, to remove you from this man's influence," said Lord Ebbrides.

He spoke loudly, his face purple with fury, his fists clinched. He was unaccustomed to being thwarted. His words stung me to wrath. How dared he allude to his past friendship—past disloyalty, rather—for my father? I felt I had endured his hated presence, his insulting overtures, too long. Holding the flowers of peace, the white lilies, close to my angry heart, I looked from under frowning brows straight into his eyes and declared war.

"Were I so base," I said, sternly, "as to forget the past and take favors from your hand, every good man and woman would have the right to shun me."

Lord Ebbrides, putting out a shaking hand, clutched the back of a chair as if in need of support, while the purple tint of anger fading slowly from his face left it livid and haggard. The effect of my words startled me, but I would not spare him.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Mr. Erranti," I went on, "was really my father's friend, loving him in his poverty, not, like you, deserting him because of it."

A strange look as of relief came over Lord Ebbrides's drawn face. The color crept back. When I finished speaking he laughed contemptuously, if a little shakily, and said, pointing an unsteady finger at Philip:

"That mountebank a friend of Charles Derohan's? What damned rubbish! A trumped-up tale to fool you with! A pack of lies to rouse your gratitude to the pitch of marrying him! You always were a dullard—have you become a fool? I suppose"—with bitter irony—"you don't see that the man's in love with you? Eh? Perhaps that unpleasantly plain fact remains a secret to your blind eyes; perhaps——"

Philip rang the bell sharply.

"Enough of this!" he cried. "I shall not allow Miss Derohan to be annoyed further. At noon a train leaves for New York. You'll be kind enough to take it, Lord Ebbrides. As for your money, which you insinuate I have stolen, it shall be returned to you—by check—when you leave." François appearing, Philip broke off to give him his orders, then continued, "Had I been so insulted by any other man I should take measures to make him eat his words, but"—waving his hand toward me—"I consider you sufficiently punished already."

His handsome face wore an expression of insolent triumph. The look in his gleaming eyes was not pleasant. Lord Ebbrides stared at him coldly, then scrutinized me closely through half-shut eyes. What he saw he found agreeable, apparently, for he smiled slightly. His excitement was gone. Taking a card from his card-case he sat down by a table and wrote thoughtfully what seemed a long address.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Philip, at his desk, filled out a check. I stood and waited, longing for the moment of escape.

"Here, Athena," said Lord Ebbrides, rising and giving me the closely written card, "are a few instructions for you to use when you change your mind. I forgive you your attack upon me. Young and ignorant, you can't be expected to understand what others misunderstood. I stand always ready to welcome you. I'm glad to see this man has no chance. I'll come for you the moment you send me word. That check is for me, sir?" turning sternly to Philip, who had come to my side, the strip of paper in his hand.

"It is," said Philip, as sternly.

Lord Ebbrides took it, tore it across twice, and dropped it in the fire.

"I pardon your impertinence," he said, haughtily, "as you can't be expected to understand the ways of gentlemen. You see what the man is, Athena. When your eyes are thoroughly opened, send for me."

He walked slowly to the door, opened it and went out, without again noticing either Philip or me.

XXX

Not wishing to follow Lord Ebbrides too closely, fearing to meet him again in the hall, longing to escape to Madam, uneasy in Philip's presence, I waited, motionless, till the minute-hand of the clock should mark the time I had forced myself to allow. I felt exhausted, unhappy.

"Athena," said a passionate voice, "give me the card!" and Philip seized the hand in which I still mechanically held it.

"No!"

My fingers closed firmly over the card, why, I could not have told.

"You shall not keep it!"

He spoke fiercely, his grip upon my hand was like iron. Still I did not yield. As if unconscious that he might give me pain he wrenched at my fingers in his passion as though they had been things of wood. I set my teeth and clung to the worthless bit of pasteboard as though to a rope thrown to save my life! I realize now that brain-fatigue had set my nerves on edge, else I could not have behaved so foolishly. Suddenly, my hand being of flesh and blood, his strength prevailed, and the card, torn from my grasp, was flung into the fire. Philip stood staring at it vindictively as it turned to ashes. I looked in wonder at my wounded hand.

The card being consumed he looked at me. My

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

pale face seemed to arouse him to a sense of what he had done. Again he seized my hand, but only to hold it tenderly to his breast while he covered it with kisses.

"My darling!" he exclaimed, "my one ewe-lamb! My only treasure! Fiend and devil that I am to have so treated you! Say that you forgive me, my white lily—or I shall go mad!"

I thought he had already done so, and, trying to draw my hand away, I told him as much in a voice icy with disgust. He released me, and said, quietly, for his passion was over:

"It's no use keeping up the farce any longer, Athena. Everyone, save you, sees how it is with me. You heard what that man said. Well, it's quite true. I love you. I have loved you ever since I first saw you. During your engagement to Mr. Thorpe I retired, because I had to, into the background. That's over now——"

"Oh, hush!" I cried, shrinking back.

"That is over now," repeated Philip, steadily, "and I mean to win you for myself. You don't hate me, Athena? Oh, for God's sake, say you don't!"

There came a dull knocking at the door.

"Come in!" shouted Philip, furious at the interruption.

It was Mathilde, as stolid as always.

"What do you want, woman?"

"Madame grows impatient. Mademoiselle is to come at once."

Very thankfully I followed her to Madam's room, although I knew I but gained a short respite. Lord Ebbrides's coming had destroyed the little peace that had been mine. Because of him I had lost my reliance on Philip, on Philip, whom I had come to regard as a faithful friend.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Since the death of Richard Thorpe I had been very unhappy. Morning after morning I waked to look forward in terror to the empty future stretching before me. My sole comfort had been in Madam's happiness in my society—in the knowledge that I was able to brighten her rapidly shortening life.

Philip had been so good to me that I had learned to trust him, and now—! His avowal of love taught me his sympathy had been false. His wild outburst of passion proved that he was, in truth, no reliable friend. My gratitude for his steady kindness began to melt away, Lord Ebbrides's insinuations to find a resting-place in my mind.

"That Mountebank a friend of Charles Dero-han's!"

I hated myself for allowing suspicion to creep into my heart. I caught myself wondering if Julie and Cray had taken the emeralds. I began to speculate about the nicked gem in the stiletto's haft—then called a halt; but one thing was of real importance after all. I had promised Madam to remain with her till the end, and she must be kept in ignorance of Philip's feelings toward me. Disagreeable as was the task, I must seek an interview with him.

The night had come, and I knew I should find him in his library. I went there at once, determined to get it over. He was standing on the hearth-rug, his back to the fire, and, if one might judge from his expression, indulging in as disagreeable thoughts as I. But when I entered his face brightened. He came eagerly to me, both hands outstretched.

"Oh, my darling," he said, tenderly, "I've been so unhappy about you! I feared I had sinned past forgiveness. Let me look at the poor hand."

Like a child I put my hands behind my back.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"If you consent to listen—quietly—to what I've come to say," I said, severely, "I shall be much obliged. If you persist in talking nonsense I shall go away."

An expression of deep melancholy clouded his handsome face. He placed a chair for me without a word, and, going to the chimney-piece, leaned against it, waiting for me to speak.

"I have promised your mother to stay with her until—until the end," I began, in a low voice, which I tried hard to keep steady.

"You have, Athena."

"It remains with you to make my stay peaceful or inexpressibly painful——"

"Athena!" he cried. I held up my hand to insure silence, and went on.

"If you treat me with the same kindness, the chivalrous courtesy that you have shown me during these past sad months, I can preserve my tranquillity and so be a good nurse to your mother. But if you insist upon making me live through such another scene as——"

"Hush, Athena! Hush, my child!" cried Philip, imploringly. "You drive daggers through my heart! I have repented—in sackcloth and ashes—for my violence of this morning. I swear to you by all I hold most sacred never to offend again. I did not dream you could be so unforgiving—you, with your angel's face!"

He paced the floor with long quick strides. I sighed deeply, wondering why I, who loved peace and the commonplace, should be forced into such companionship. I had no sympathy with his turbulent passions, but sat and watched him, with the same sensations as those with which, when a child, I had watched the restless pacing of a panther in its cage at the Zoo.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"If you will control yourself—I know you can when you wish—I shall be glad to live here as before." He stopped his walk to listen. "If you persist in talking as you did this morning, and but now, I shall avoid you as much as possible."

"Which means," said Philip, slowly, "that you will live entirely in your own room and *Maman's*?"

"Yes."

"Why do you deny me the right of saying that I love you?"

I looked at him, but made no answer.

"Because of Dick Thorpe, you would say, but he is gone. You were not his wife, why mourn him as his widow? No, don't go, Athena! I'll speak this once; then, if you insist, keep silence, for—I can wait. Your feeling toward Thorpe was but calm affection. You don't know what real love—passionate love—means. It is such I feel—I will teach you to return it."

I rose, saying, icily:

"It is useless to talk to you. I have no request to make. Spare Madam all knowledge of—this. It could only pain her."

"One moment, Athena! It shall be as you wish. I shall not allude to my feelings again. Of course *maman* must hear nothing that might excite her. If we agree on this subject—I swear we shall later—then— Pray resume your usual mode of life. You shall find me the same Philip to whom you have been kind so long. May I finish the story I began last night?"

"Certainly, Philip."

I spoke quietly, struggling against the feeling of cold dislike that was taking possession of me. I knew what an effort he was making, and pride forbade my seeking refuge in flight. I fetched my work and embroidered while he read until nearly eleven,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

when, the tale coming to an end, I was able at last to say "good-night!"

"Good-night, Athena!" opening the door for me to pass out. "Don't fear my breaking my promise. My silence shall be a proof of my love, and, as I said before—I can wait!"

XXXI

"When I die I shall be buried on the knoll, not under that dark grove of firs—no, no, not there, but just in front, where the sunshine falls always. Not in the black shadow of those trees—all my life has been passed in a great shadow! It has gloomed over me, about me, around me! My grave shall be in the sunshine, Athena!"

It was Madam who spoke. She was lying, propped up by pillows, in a great lounging-chair by the south window of her room, which was opened wide to admit the soft May air, the warm May sunshine. From her chair she could look far down the long vista of the avenue—a leafy tunnel of tender green. All the world around her, with its creatures, was awake to the joy of renewed life and vigor, but her thoughts were of death. She had just escaped from the valley of shadows, the landscape still seemed dark. She had been ill many, many weeks.

My embroidery, white lilies on a flowing garment of soft white silk, was of more interest to her than the spring blossoms. Her eyes were more often upon my busy fingers than upon the flowers of Nature's handiwork outside her casement.

"I shall be buried at midnight, by moonlight, Athena, or by the light of torches. And you, my darling, will not let strangers touch these poor old limbs. You have promised, and your word is as the word of God—unchanging, everlasting. Philip shall read the burial service. No prying eyes shall

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

see me laid to rest. To rest," she repeated, "to rest! You say so, but I am not sure. I have that on my soul— Why are we never alone? There's some reason for it. These women have become spies."

"No, no," I said, soothingly. "They mean well. They nursed you faithfully."

Madam smiled. She had spoken in English, for Mathilde, whom she disliked, was present; and, although we had discovered that she understood English, we had also learned that when we spoke rapidly she could not follow our meaning.

"It is you who have saved my life, Athena, not these French devils. I heard the doctor say so. You nursed me day and night—for love, and not for money."

"Look at Don, dear Madam, asleep in the sunshine! He is growing very fat. Too fat, for so young a dog."

"You grow thin, Athena! Too thin, for so young a girl."

"I'm not young," I said, smiling. "You forget that I had a birthday last month."

"Twenty years old!" she said, and sighed. "Ah, me! I, too, felt old at twenty. You had a vile birthday, nursing an old woman! Philip complains that you refused his gifts."

"Dear Madam! A rope of pearls fit for a queen! I accepted his flowers and the books!"

"He is a fool—all men are fools, or knaves. Philip is both—yes, both."

"Here he comes," I said, as a horseman appeared far down the avenue, Philip, on Captain Kidd.

"You never ride now, Athena! Philip says you won't—but I'm not sure that he wishes it."

I stared at her in wonder. One might never guess what Madam saw, or did not see. I had thought Philip relieved when I refused to recommence my

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

morning rides. Not but what he had kept his promise in regard to keeping silence on one subject. He had behaved almost invariably as the kind friend I had believed him to be before Lord Ebbrides's visit. His devotion to Madam during her long illness had compelled my admiration, and I could but feel grateful for the way in which he had spared me all care and responsibility whenever that was possible. Still, I never felt at my ease with him unless Madam was present. Before her he would say nothing, I felt sure.

"Philip, too, has grown thin," said Madam, watching him as he rode up. "He looks the better for it. He is very handsome, and looks far younger than he is. He looks not more than thirty! How can he, how can he keep so young! It is only his body—not his heart. That is old, old, old!"

He entered as she ceased speaking.

"I may come in, *maman*?"

She stretched out her hand to him, smiling kindly. Rarely was she so kind.

"I was just speaking of you, Philip."

He seated himself close beside her—I giving place—and kissed both the crippled hands gently.

"You said something pleasant I hope, *maman*."

"I was admiring you, Philip. You look so young, so handsome, so vigorous, so strong!"

He laughed, well pleased. There was suppressed excitement in his manner, I thought. I had learned to know him well.

"I feel even younger than I look, *maman*," he said, gayly. "I feel the fresh breath of spring. It has set my blood dancing through my veins. They talk of midsummer madness—what of the wild restlessness of spring? It has infected me. I'm tired of this place. I long to be afloat on the blue water. The desire to wander is upon me. Will you come?"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

He spoke to Madam, but he looked at me, and his eyes said what his tongue might not say. I was frightened. What if Madam understood? She already loved me as a daughter. What more natural than that she might wish me to become so in very truth? My future was her one anxiety. As Philip's wife that future would be assured. It had surprised me that he had not sought his mother's assistance in his suit, and I had admired the delicacy shown in sparing me this discomfort. Was he about to take her into his confidence now?

"Afloat in the Charlotte, Philip?" asked Madam. "Is that what you mean? You wish me to go—or only Athena? The poor child needs a change." She stared dreamily from the window as she spoke, looking almost asleep.

"Only Athena, *maman*? Does that mean you prefer being at home?"

His musical voice was vibrant with eagerness. Again his eyes sought mine. They glowed with triumph, and with a fire that turned me cold. I tried to attend only to my embroidery. I was finishing the last lily. The others were hidden beneath white tissue paper, tacked carefully over all to keep them free from stain. This rustled as, involuntarily, I moved a little farther from Madam and her son. Attracted by the sound, Madam turned her eyes from the window and looked long at me. In their bright depths lay a great tenderness and a something more that I did not understand.

"Yes, she needs a change, my Athena," she said, "and so do I. But I'll not go with you, Philip. As for Athena—why move so far away, dear child? There's room for you and Philip both at my side. Move her chair, Philip, close beside yours, so that you both face me. Is the lily finished yet, my child? In a few moments? That is well. Put down your

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

work one moment and lay your hands in my lap—so.”

I obeyed in silence, but I trembled. A great dread had come upon me. Was she fey? There was intelligence—an intelligence far deeper than mine—in her worn features. I saw a new Madam, one I had never known; the Madam who had existed before illness had warped her brain. Dominated by his passion Philip was blind to this change. He saw and thought only of me.

“Now your hands, Philip,” the quiet voice commanded. “Place them beside Athena’s. Ah, how lithe and supple these brown fingers! Athena’s, though so white, so delicately fashioned, are as strong—for a woman’s! But women are weak always when compared with men.”

As we leaned, Philip and I, toward her, his shoulder touched mine. I shivered at the contact, yet dared not draw away. A sudden, even if pleasant excitement might cause Madam’s death. Her heart was weak. Did I fail to control my feeling of repulsion there might be a scene. He must not even suspect it. In my dread I forced myself to lean slightly against him. The effort drove the blood to my heart. I knew even my lips were paling. I kept my eyes down. I could not look in Madam’s face.

“See how strangely my hands look, Philip, as I push them between yours and Athena’s! Very ugly, very old, weak, incompetent—yet, I dare keep them there! I have lost everything, even my vanity.” She laughed, such a strange, little laugh, then said, drowsily, “I will sleep a moment, but stay where you are. Talk if you like; just a moment’s rest, and—then——”

Her voice died away. She slept.

The silence was broken only by the sweet sounds

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

from the world outside, the world of trees, and blossoms, and birds, floating in on the warm breeze of high noon. I resumed my work, embroidering diligently. If Madam slept a few long moments the last stitch would be placed in the lily.

The day was exceptionally warm, more like midsummer than May. I wore one of my thinnest muslins of the past summer. Its hanging sleeves—of lace—left my arms bare.

"Is it as cold as the marble it resembles?" murmured Philip. "My eyes burn, Athena, let me cool them here."

Passing his right arm around my waist he drew me closer to him, while with his left hand he clasped my wrist, so that I could not move, and, so holding me, pressed his face against my upper arm and kept it there.

Madam stirred uneasily and moaned, then slept more heavily than before. The misery of discovery was yet spared me. In spite of the lithe fingers girdling my left wrist the hand still steadied my work. My other was free; its fingers plied the needle more swiftly than before. Philip's face branded my arm like hot iron, a scourge of shame. Yet I must endure, lest Madam, roused by sudden outcry and confusion, might wake to her death. My heart was icy with scorn of the man who could so insult me in his mother's presence.

"My darling!" he said, gently, lifting his face at last and looking at me beseechingly. "My pearl of great price! My pure white lily! Let me read your thoughts in your beautiful eyes! Let me learn from them if you are really at rest in my arms! Look up, sweetheart! Let me make sure that you have learned to love me."

The lily neared perfection, the needle flashed in and out.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Athena!" the beautiful voice murmured, "Athena! For just one moment raise those sweet eyes to mine! I can wait no longer; I am not made of stone! You heard what *Maman* said—she is willing we should go away together, you and I! Tell me you consent, my darling! Look at me, give me hope, I have waited so long——"

The lily had attained its full growth. My task was finished. There came the sound of footsteps on the gravel. Someone was approaching the window. Madam stirred. I looked full into Philip's eyes.

"Release me at once. Someone is coming. Unless you wish to kill Madam, control yourself."

As if involuntarily he freed me. I rose silently to my feet, and just in time. A man's face appeared at the window—Randal St. John.

"May I come in?" he cried, gayly, looking, not at Philip, who had his finger on his lips, but directly at Madam. "Ah! I fear I started you. Didn't your wicked son tell you I'd come home? No, I see he didn't. He has a pale and guilty look! He's jealous of me because I find favor in your sight."

Scrambling in at the window he kissed Madam's hand with a burlesque air of devotion.

"*Vaurien!*" she exclaimed, reprovingly. She seemed pleased to see him. "I've had a bad dream, Randal! When you stared in I thought you part of it—I was frightened! Where is your cousin? Where is Richard Thorpe?"

Randal, turning very pale, glanced at Philip as if for assistance. Madam spoke again without waiting for an answer.

"Ah! I remember. My Athena, forgive me! Forgive an old woman who would die to save you pain! I would, I would, I would!"

"What's all this gorgeousness?" cried Randal, recovering himself and good-naturedly trying to di-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

vert her mind. "Miss Derohan's fist, I'll go bail! What's the use of this paper—may I peep under? Lilies were never meant to blush unseen!"

He lifted the mass of silk I had just laid down, with an extravagant assumption of care.

"It is finished, Athena?" demanded Madam, sitting up among her pillows. Her eyes sparkled with animation, a color had crept into her cheeks. "Take off the paper. Let Randal see your handiwork. Foolish boy! The paper is to guard the lilies. The spotless lilies! Unless spotless they had better lie withered and dead—yes, dead!"

Her whimsical look and manner had returned. The intelligence that had so alarmed me had vanished. Indeed, she behaved even more oddly than usual, for, the tissue-paper being removed from my embroidery, she bade me put on the loose robe over my gown. I looked at her inquiringly. Could she really mean what she said?

"Put it on," she repeated, imperiously, "unless you fear to do so."

Smiling sadly, I shook my head.

"Of course you won't hurt it, Miss Derohan," said Randal, in honeyed tones, helping me slip my arms into the wide sleeves of the garment. "You're too much like a lily yourself, so white and pure."

Philip stood by us, gloomy and severe. My words had, like a douche of ice-water, brought him to himself. His sombre eyes rested upon me steadily as I clothed myself in the heavily embroidered robe, whose soft folds fell to my feet.

"These flowers are wonderful!" exclaimed Randal, a ring of sincerity in his voice. "They look real enough to smell sweet! I never saw anything like them—such quantities, yet so artistically grouped! You have magic in your handsome fingers, Miss Derohan! What's the thing for, anyhow? Not a dress-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ing-gown for Erranti, I hope! The old wolf needn't try to hide himself in any lamb's fleece—his black fur'd be sure to stick out somewhere! Is it for me? I'd look real sweet in it!" He smiled disagreeably.

"No, no! It's not for you," said Madam, vehemently, "and you'll never see it again! It is a bridal garment—but the bridegroom is long in coming."

Her voice had lowered to a whisper. Randal eyed her curiously, then looked at Philip, standing, arms folded, a gloomy spectator of the little scene.

"A bridal garment? I'm not to see it again? Dear Madam, how cruel you are! Mayn't I come to the wedding?" Randal spoke plaintively; then, turning to me: "Is it for you to wear—as a bride, Miss Derohan?"

"No, no!" said Madam, laughing oddly. "No, no, no! The robe is for me, Randal; but Athena will be my tiring-woman when I wear it, because of the love she bears me."

"What do you mean, *maman*?" asked Philip. He spoke impatiently, rousing himself with an effort from the reverie into which he had fallen. "Pray explain—I detest riddles."

But Madam was in a teasing humor. Leaning back among her pillows she laughed again, looking at him mockingly through half-closed eyelids.

"I did not say you saw it for the last time, Philip. Perhaps only for the first of many, many times! Should you do evil the lilies will stir and disturb me. Then, in the night, the dark, dark night, the lilies and I will come with gentle shivering rustle through the halls—up the staircase—to your bedside—close, close to you! You open your eyes—and yes, yes, yes—you see that robe again!"

Her voice sank to a mere whisper. Lifting herself erect, she pointed her finger at Philip. His set

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

face grew white under its tan as he stared at her, terror-stricken yet fascinated. Randal looked pale and startled. Madam glanced from one to the other.

"It is my shroud," she said, and fell back as though exhausted.

"*Maman!*" cried Philip, in bitter reproach. "How could you—how dared you! Take it off, Athena, instantly; do you hear me? My God, what an awful omen!"

With no gentle hand he tore the garment from my shoulders, saying, under his breath:

"I'll never forgive her, never! How could she have the heart to do it!"

As the robe fell to the floor he seized and flung it savagely to one side. The latent brutality in his nature was shaken to the surface. I dreaded what might come, but Madam appeared unconscious of the storm she had aroused. Her eyes closed, her features in perfect repose, she looked weary but at ease.

"I have been ever careful," said Philip, breaking the uncomfortable silence, "to consider your feelings, Madam; treating you with tenderness, shielding you from every vexation, yielding to your every wish. Never have I asked any return save a little affection—such as you might give to a faithful dog! It's time I took my own way—and I shall. On Saturday morning be ready to embark with me on the Charlotte. We shall spend the summer abroad."

He turned to leave the room, but Madam stopped him.

"And Athena?" She spoke gently, her eyes still closed. "Athena is under no obligations to you, Philip. Have you asked her what she will do?"

"She goes with us, of course," he said, coldly, and, accompanied by the bewildered Randal, left the room.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Put me to bed, my Athena, for I am very weary," said Madam. "Yes, Philip may go to Europe, but—he shall go alone!"

I lifted her tenderly in my arms. What might a feeble old lady do to thwart Philip's iron will?

"If Mademoiselle will permit," said Mathilde at my elbow, "Monsieur forbids that Mademoiselle should lift Madame."

"Good Mathilde!" exclaimed Madam. "Ever the devoted nurse! I prefer her to help me, Athena."

I drew back astonished. It was unlike Madam to praise her maids. Was she trying to conciliate Philip by approving his orders?

"Monsieur lunches now with Monsieur St. John," Mathilde continued, "and goes to town immediately after. Cray also. François is to sleep in the hall."

Madam made no comment. I sighed with relief. Three hours later François brought me the following note:

"Will you try to win *maman's* forgiveness for me, a sinner, my dearest child? I did not mean to speak roughly, but you know how sorely my temper had just been tried. Yet I beg your pardon, my Queen, as I do *maman's*. Persuade her to consent to this trip. We all stand in need of change, as the scene of this morning proved convincingly. Remember how much good the sail up the Hudson did *maman*."

"I have infinite faith in your good sense, your sweet unselfishness. You will see the force of what I urge. *Maman* will yield to your wishes, and a summer in Europe will make her strong again.

"Your devoted

"PHILIP ERRANTI."

There was no address on the envelope. The uneven writing showed the letter had been written in

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

the carriage, on the way to the station. I put it in my pocket. Madam had had enough excitement for one day. It must be my hateful task to persuade Philip to give up his crazy scheme. Madam would die in the yacht before a day on the rough water was over. These thoughts made the afternoon and evening seem never-ending; but at last nine o'clock came, and I was stealing away quietly when Madam spoke. I had thought her asleep.

"Stay with me to-night, *chérie*. I am nervous without—my son. Sleep by my side, Athena, that this poor Julie may rest. A French devil, but better than that Mathilde, who spilled my medicine this afternoon. Yes, all, all." She whimpered drowsily, then, lifting herself a little, she peered about the room. "The little bottle is gone! Cat, awkward pig! I must lie awake because of her! Awake, all night!"

She covered her face as if about to cry. Julie and I searched anxiously for the bottle—it contained her sleeping draught—and Julie found it.

"Give it me!" cried Madam, eagerly. "I trust no one, no one! I will put it beneath my pillow. Quick, Julie."

The woman hesitated, glancing inquiringly at me. Madam saw the glance.

"Fool!" she exclaimed. "Did I drink all, it could not kill."

"If Mademoiselle remains through the night——"

"Yes," I said, "I will stay."

"It may leak," suggested Julie, still doubtful.

Madam snatched the bottle from her hand and thrust it beneath her pillow.

The maid retreated, saying to me that she would fetch me a dressing-gown.

"Cray being in town Mathilde sleeps in my room to-night," she volunteered, "François in the great

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

hall, I"—waving toward a divan in the corner—"here."

When she returned Madam began an apology.

"I have been cross," she said. "I am sorry—yes, sorry. I need constant care—they will hate me if I am cross. I must make amends." She thought a moment. "Julie, my good girl, bring the three glasses from my little cabinet—the green, the red, the opaline! Ah, but that they are pretty!"—as Julie, fetching them with great alacrity, placed them on the bed-tray. "Now, bid François bring Benedictine—in a light pitcher that I can myself lift. Yes, I must fill the glasses, else no true compliment is paid. Go, *ma fille!*"

Hardly had the door closed upon Julie when Madam gave a low cry of fear.

"The bed!" she whispered. "Under the bed! They are there! Oh, look, Athena!"

As always in such crises I humored her instantly, dropping upon hands and knees and looking for what was not.

"Nothing here!" I cried, from the level of the floor.

"Look once again, my child! Make sure—have patience; look again."

"Nothing, on my honor, dear Madam! May I get up?"

"Yes, yes, my Athena! Forgive an old woman for her fretting ways. Bad dreams, bad dreams! Ah, here is François, with the sweet drink! The pitcher? Yes, François, I lift it easily. See the glasses, like gay bubbles—Venetian glass, François; very precious, very rare. Go, now, but send Mathilde—turn your backs," she cried sharply to Julie and me. "I grow nervous thus watched. I shall spill! Your faces to the curtain there, else you'll be staring in the mirrors!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Then I was called to receive my share.

"But I rarely touch wine, dear Madam," I remonstrated.

"This is not wine, Athena."

"The same thing," I insisted, moving in obedience to a motion of her head to the other side of the bed, where I faced her and Julie.

Madam closed her hand around the bowl of a glass. It gleamed like a great opal, leaving the stem free.

"Lift it carefully! Don't spill the rich contents—drink them down! This is not wine, my child!"

She looked straight into my eyes. The expression in hers daunted me—commanding, deeply intelligent. I obeyed, and saw what her encircling hand had concealed. The glass was empty! Quickly I closed my own about it.

"A health!" I cried, gayly, lifting it to my lips with simulated care. "May you always gain your heart's desire, Madam Erranti!"

After draining nothingness, I cried out against its fierce heat, and filling the glass from a carafe of water, drank again and again—to cool my burning throat.

The maids laughed with ill-concealed contempt. Madam, in tones of childish regret, bemoaned her cruelty.

"It gives Mademoiselle a fine color," said Julie. "She would do well to follow the advice of Monsieur, and take it always with her dinner."

"Come," cried Madam. "Julie and Mathilde! It is your turn. Drink not to me, but to the happy future of Mademoiselle de Rohan!"

The women, sipping the liquor in high good-humor, gave me their best wishes very willingly. Then Mathilde went away, Julie disposed herself

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

comfortably upon her couch in a distant corner, and I lay down beside Madam.

I was ill at ease. The little comedy I had enacted in answer to the command of Madam's eyes worried me. Why had I obeyed my instinct so quickly? I had been dominated by her will, I told myself. Had I done wrong? Then my thoughts reverted to Philip's wish for forgiveness. Should I have told Madam of his remorse? Conscience now hinted that I had feared her agitation less than I had assured myself, and asked if it had not been over easy to shun the topic I detested. Staring with troubled eyes at the frescoed ceiling I knew I had "left undone those things which" I "ought to have done." The clock on the chimney-piece chimed the half-hour—half-past ten.

"Athena, are you awake?"

Madam spoke in the gentlest whisper. I answered as softly:

"Yes."

She laid her hand on my shoulder and opened her eyes cautiously, as if fearing detection.

"Julie sleeps soundly? Yes? Her back is turned, I can't be sure—she breathes heavily.—Listen!"

I held my breath. From the corner came the sound of deep breathing.

"Rise quietly and make sure," said Madam. "Place your hand on her shoulder—she may wake."

"If she should?"

"Say she was snoring—go!"

I slipped noiselessly from my place to Julie. I laid my hand on her shoulder—she did not stir. I returned to Madam and whispered:

"She sleeps as soundly as though drugged."

Madam smiled strangely.

"Go like a cat to the door, open it silently. See what there is to see—use your ears, also."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I obeyed. The little corridor was empty. The doors leading to the hall and to Julie's room were closed. Through the latter came the sound of snoring. This I told Madam. She sighed as if relieved, then, in low tones, bade me lie down again beside her.

"Take yourself well in hand, my child. No matter what I say, no exclamations, no springing up in haste. Keep your eyes on the door. If it moves an inch, warn me. I see and can watch Julie. If she wakes we must feign sleep. But I've little fear of Julie or her sister spy for several hours. I drugged their Benedictine."

She drew the little bottle from beneath her pillow. It was empty.

"No favoritism was shown! I decided fairly. Each spy got half. Fill the bottle half full with water, Athena. Be careful, be exact. It was just half full."

I stared in horror. What had she done?

"Don't be foolish, child! The mixture is mild, it can do no harm."

Reflecting that she was right and that the women could not be injured by so light a dose, I did as she bade me. She slipped the bottle underneath her pillow again.

"I have much to say," she whispered, as I resumed my place at her side, "and I dread it so! Keep your eyes on the door, *mignonne*, don't look at me. Now, what was in Philip's letter?"

Her voice had a new intonation, her eyes the same expression of intelligence, of will-power, that had earlier startled me. She saw my astonishment.

"You look not at the door, but at me! This will not do. We may be disturbed at any moment. Come, to our watch, and I will say what must be said."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Dominated anew I obeyed, turning my eyes upon the door, yet was at variance with myself for being impressed by what must be, could be, but a new whim.

"Philip loves you," said the low, firm voice; "this I know. I began to suspect it before the odd feeling in my head stopped; but my mind would never work, and my thoughts rambled far away when I tried to seize them. To-day, when the mist cleared suddenly, I understood his feelings—and knew I had got my death-warrant. Lie still, poor child," as I started, terror-stricken, "don't interrupt me! For your sake I must speak—for yours and Philip's."

Ah, what was coming! Must I be tortured, at this last moment, by her pleadings for her son?

"When the buzzing wheels in my head stopped short I saw your look of fear—your pallor. It was when he proposed this voyage, when I made you sit beside him. Then I feigned sleep and—I saw more. You hate him, Athena?"

"Yes."

"Thank God! I thought so, but— Ah! thank God! And Philip? He is content to work for Athena Derohan? He asks no more? He dare not. Tell the truth; he asks no more?"

"He wishes me to become his wife," I said, faintly.

"She thinks she will never consent," muttered Madam to herself, "but she may. Only a child in the ways of the world, while he—Athena! Swear, swear by your belief in God—but no, what use? Why do I try to escape? I will be brave—I will, I will! I might make him take his oath—but no! He spoke roughly to-day—the new love swallows up the old. What use, what use?"

"He begs forgiveness," I made haste to say. "He

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

regrets his harsh words. His letter was to beg me to tell you so."

The strange smile flickered again across her worn face.

"I dare say." There was quiet scorn in the low voice. "He is clever. He knows I am his trump-card, when in his hand. But he has shuffled badly, and I am in yours. Has he ever spoken of his past—or of mine?"

"Yes, once."

"What did he say? Speak, child—have no fear."

"He told me of your girlhood," I faltered, unwillingly.

"Of my marriage?"

"Yes."

"Of the ruin of my life?"

"Yes."

"How much, I wonder? He spoke of the plantation—of my life there?"

"Yes."

"He told of my husband's brutality?"

"Yes."

"Fetch me some cordial, Athena! Go softly—one spoonful only—but place it near. No, no, don't thwart me; go on. Did he tell of—of my husband's death?"

"Yes."

"Told—who—shot—him?"

"Yes."

"Who? Oh, my God, who?"

"A young man whom he had wronged."

"His name?"

"Philip did not say."

Madam closed her eyes, exhausted, yet laid a warning finger on my arm when, in my alarm, I would have risen.

"Ah! He is clever!" she murmured. "To tell

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

so much—yet so little! You must know all, must defend yourself when I am gone—you are listening?”

“Yes, dear Madam.”

“You must not marry Philip. You must not even be his friend, now—but try, oh, try, to make allowances for him in your great heart! He belongs to another class—nay, more, he is of a different race. For he is not my son, Athena. He was born—my slave!”

XXXII

The clock ticked gently on the chimney-piece. Julie slept heavily in the corner. Madam and I were still.

I thought of a handsome, dark face—the lips too full for perfect beauty. I thought of two lithe brown hands—brown through a long Northern winter. I thought of the many peculiarities that had puzzled me. I had likened him to an Indian Rajah—this man, who had dared forget his blood so far as to think of me with love!

How could I, with my present knowledge, bear to meet him again? A feeling of horror assailed me. In vain I strove to conquer it—to force my mind into the kindly channels of toleration, of pity. I reminded myself that he had suffered, must still, because of me, suffer. I shivered with dislike, repulsion. Someone seemed trampling over my grave——

Madam again began to speak. It was as if, having made the plunge, she found relief in unburdening her heart. I made no effort to stop her, although at times her voice failed her altogether. I saw that it would be in vain. Moistening her lips with the cordial now and again, I listened in silence to what she chose to tell. Her name, the name of the city of her birth, of the plantation, she never mentioned. Her pride still lived, would live to the end.

“His mother, Athena,” she began again, “had white blood in her veins—perhaps. If so, not much,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I think. A beautiful creature! Tall, straight, supple as a wildcat—a half savage thing! Philip has her eyes—like black diamonds, yet soft and lustrous. Poor Lola—poor, poor girl! Philip has her warm, narrow heart, her fearfully passionate nature, her wild-beast temper! Yet because of the father in him—his father, cruel, calculating, cold—I can never quite love him. A devil, his father! Without a heart! Philip is like him in many ways. Yes, like both parents. A strange mixture, an awful combination—a scourge!

“I remember well the night—winter, and cold for that warm part of the world—when the poor girl came. My husband had been away for weeks, gambling, living the life of a beast. When I heard a carriage stop before the house and knew he had come home my heart turned sick! He had gone away on horseback—what might the carriage mean? Watching from my window I saw him, with an air of gallantry, hand a richly dressed woman across the veranda. I looked in terror—had one of my girlhood’s friends come to visit me in my unhappy home? My proud heart winced. I was middle-aged, thirty-eight years old. I had become hardened to my husband’s vices, had learned to endure without complaint my ruined life. But only because my friends, my kindred, were ignorant of the depths of my misery, I might not endure their scorn—or pity. I went downstairs slowly, very slowly. Then I saw my husband’s face, and knew what new scourge he had brought for me.

“‘Put back your veil, Lola,’ he said. ‘Let my old wife see the superior beauty of my new one! She’s mistress here now, Charlotte! See to it that you and the other servants do her bidding!’”

“Poor Lola meant no harm; but she loved her master, and sought to please him by flouting me—

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

and I, at first, was angry. She sat in my place at table, she—ah, well! it's all over now. Before the year was out Philip was born—Philip, meaning 'a lover of horses.' He was to be bred a groom. Handsome, said to look like his father, he was, by him, spoiled and beaten in turn. Sorry for the child, I gave him only kind words, taught him to read, strove to teach him to control his temper, that he might escape his father's whip. He called his mother 'mammy,' but me always '*bonne maman!*' Because of the child, Lola learned to love me.

"One day, when he was eight years old, there was an awful scene—I dream of it sometimes! Philip was to be whipped. To add to the punishment, Lola, a mere house-servant for many years now, was called to the library to witness it. She hated her master—as she, only, could hate. Forced to watch him as he punished her boy—cruelly, with devilish pleasure—to see Philip grow white and weak from pain, yet scorn to ask for quarter—the hatred in her heart rose to her brain and drove her mad. She rushed upon her master, tore the child from him, then, gripping him by the throat, she strove to kill him! Poor Lola! She did not succeed! She was put to work in the fields. Philip was sent to school—in England. He wrote to me, sometimes—but never asked for his mother!

"My husband, proud of the boy's looks, of the progress he made at school—he was an apt scholar—swore he should pass as our son. A threat only, but he kept Philip abroad until he was nineteen. He would be twenty in six months, I remember. *Mon Dieu!* it seems but yesterday—and more than twenty-one years ago! It was just before the war. There was no one on the plantation who knew Philip, when he returned. Poor Lola had been again sent to live at the quarters, because of her son's coming.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

She was forbidden to seek him, to speak to him; but one night—her master was away—she came. It was late, Philip alone in the library, reading. Thank God I did not hear his cruel words disowning, repulsing her; but later I heard moaning outside my door.—Poor soul, she had sought help of me, but had fallen at my threshold. She was very ill. Philip found many excuses for his heartless behavior. I was his mother; his father had promised it should be so. Never, so help him God, would he acknowledge to anyone the taint in his blood! He was obdurate. Things went smoothly enough for some months, but Philip and his father were too much alike—two devils breed flames!

“They quarrelled one evening. In the morning Philip was whipped publicly at the whipping-post. Lola was brought, among the others, to witness her son’s disgrace. It maddened her, as such a sight had years before, and again she flung herself, in her frantic passion, upon the man who had wronged her. Then her punishment followed. She was beaten—ah, I wonder I did not die of my impotence and my despair! I, who stood by, and might not save! She died that night, in my arms! Then, in spite of the threats of those on guard, I made my way to Philip. It was the night after. He was being starved into submission. I took him food, and he—he made a plan. I consented. I did wrong. God has punished me. I brought him clothes, a knife—a revolver. I sewed my jewels into the lining of my dress. At midnight, two nights after Lola’s death, we ran away!”

Silence again in the gayly tinted room, where a heart was breaking anew over a long past tragedy.

“Dear God,” moaned the poor lady, “give me courage! I must tell all to this white soul, this purest of Thy children! I feared not for my own

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

life, Athena, but for Philip's. I thought to save his father from the awful sin of killing his child.—What came, my God, what came!

"We fled to the swamps. Ah, I must confess all! I feared the whipping-post! My husband was a devil—what might he do to me when he learned I had helped Philip? I should have stayed, I know—*Eh bien!* I fled—with Philip—to the swamps. There we must hide till, in his clumsy boat—his shooting-boat—we might escape on the river. It was the last of March, but hot to suffocation; like to-day here, a strange hot spell of weather. In the swamp, when day came, it was dreadful—close, deadly. All day my heart beat so loudly I thought Philip must hear it and lose courage. Not that I had lost mine. I had sworn I'd not go back alive. I had that in my pocket which should save me.

"Philip, his face set, looking ten years older since the shame put upon him, never forgot my need of care.

"'If we escape, *maman*,' he said, 'you are my mother in earnest?'

"I promised. I have kept my word until now. To save one of my own class from dishonor I break it, though the breaking send me straight to hell! Those of my blood stand by their own class always. You are a Derohan, I—well, for you I break my word.

"I saved my name, my husband's name, from disgrace. I bade Philip choose another. We decided what we could, to help us bear the long waiting—not till night might we venture farther.

"'Thy knight-errant from this day, *maman*,' said Philip, 'I choose the name, Erranti.'

"As he spoke the sky darkened. A shower was coming. We heard thunder in the distance. A sighing wind waved the long moss on the branches

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

and brought a sound that chilled our blood—the far-off baying of dogs. The bloodhounds were out—their cry told us they had found the trail.

“A desperate look was in Philip’s eyes. We knew we must take to the boat. Seizing my arm he dragged me toward the narrow bayou which put in from the river. There the boat lay concealed. It was too late. Close behind, their heads parting the tall grasses as if they were swimming, came the dogs. Among them rode a man—my husband! He had ridden hard, he was splashed with mud from head to foot. He was alone, but I knew his overseers, with others, were close behind. A devil, he had distanced them.

“I crouched at the foot of a great tree. Philip stood before me. My husband, drawing up his horse, bent his cold gray eyes upon us and laughed—enjoying his power and our despair. The laugh of a fiend, full of dreadful threats! I felt in my bosom for the little vial that was to save me from what my husband’s laughter promised. There came at that moment a deafening peal of thunder; with it a blue glare of lightning, illuminating the horrors of the swamp, and the wicked face of the man above us. Then, through the ghastly light, shot a streak of red flame. I heard the sharp report of a revolver. I saw my husband fall from his frightened horse—saw Philip, springing forward, shoot again. I lost consciousness, stunned by horror of Philip’s deed. My dear, my dear, he had killed his father!”

I thought from her pallor that she had fainted; but no, she swallowed the cordial I gave her and motioned me back to my place. I marvelled at her determination, at the will-power that so dominated the weakness of illness and old age.

“Thank God that you escaped!” I whispered, pressing my lips to the hand she had laid in mine,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"that Philip saved you! Pray God, the shot went home!"

"Athena!"

Then I remembered her last words, forgotten in my relief at her pursuer's disablement. She had accused Philip of wrongdoing. And I—I thought he had but done his duty. This I said to her. She eyed me curiously, saying, again and again:

"He killed his master, and his father, his master and father—an awful crime."

Distressed by this strange way of thinking, this disapproval of justice meted out, I could not help showing that I thought it unnatural. I disliked Philip, but surely he deserved praise, not blame, from his benefactress, whom he had saved.

"It is a pity to name a child wrong," she complained, feebly. "Thy name has infected thee—thou hast become as the goddess Athena, as cold, as stern, as unforgiving. A slave must not kill his master. A son must not shoot his father. An awful crime! I shared it, living with a murderer, keeping his secret. When first alone with Philip, out upon the river, I hated him, but feared him as well. So I held my tongue—I shared his crime. God pity me!"

"Later, in France, when I ate the bread he earned, I sank deeper. It was earned by hands red with a father's blood! Yet he prospered. Twice, because of his fierce temper, he got into trouble. He fought two duels. In the last he killed his man, so we had to leave Paris. We came home—no, not home! We have none, Philip and I—deserve none, for we are accursed. A murderer always dies hard; must face a violent death, 'tis said. Philip, too, lies under a woman's curse, but it should weigh for little. The wife of the man he killed in Paris, she cursed him. She did wrong. A duel is honorable. Philip

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

was brought up a gentleman. There, Philip did right, Athena, *n'est-ce pas?*"

I made no answer. Again we were not in sympathy.

"The man had accused Philip of cheating at play. His honor demanded,—Eh, Athena, you hear me? Philip was right, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Pray rest, dear Madam," I begged. Why say to her, if Philip must avenge himself, where were his fists? Why not have broken a cane across the insulter's shoulders? "Try to sleep now. You have wearied yourself too long."

"I have confessed, my heart is less heavy—yet to break one's word——"

She was quiet for a time. Then, beginning to talk again, her mind, little by little, lost its clearness. She forgot where she was, who was beside her. Now she gave orders to Julie, or scolded Mathilde; again, chatted gayly with Randal, or spoke soberly to Philip. Toward morning she fell into a light slumber. I, too, slept.

I was roused by her voice calling me loudly. Opening my eyes I saw her sitting up, both hands extended as if for aid.

"Athena!" she cried, "I cannot see! Pray for me—pray, pray!"

Frightened, scarce knowing what I did, I took her hands in mine, repeating the prayer that rises to all lips in time of need.

"Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name——"

"Hallowed—be—Thy—name," faltered Madam; and once again, "Hallowed—be—Thy—name——"

Her head fell forward. I caught her in my arms. Madam Erranti was dead.

The room glowed with rosy light. The outside world was gay with the song of birds. The day had come.

XXXIII

It was noon when Philip came home. I went to meet him, and, at his request, entered with him the chamber of death. His face was haggard with dread, but this expression vanished when once he had crossed the threshold of Madam's room.

"God bless you, Athena," he said.

The windows stood wide. Madam loved light, warm air, and sunshine. Flowers were heaped everywhere—Madam loved the fresh spring blossoms. She lay among them, wrapped in the soft folds of her shroud of lilies, as if asleep; peaceful, serene—at rest.

Philip fell on his knees by her bedside. I stole softly away. At midnight my duties would end. After to-morrow—I should leave at noon—I should never see Highgrove Hall again. My service there was over.

I had shed no tears. It had seemed so well with the dead. No hands but mine had touched her. I had watched by her until Philip, who had first right to that place, came to assume it. Then, going to my room, I wrote to Mrs. Welborn, asking to stay with her until I should again find a position. Remembering under whose roof I was, how urgent the necessity of speedy departure, I added this postscript:

"To-day is Wednesday. Knowing you will give me shelter I shall expect no answer, but will be with you to-morrow, Thursday evening, without fail."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I ran downstairs and put it into the post-bag myself. François entered the hall at the same time.

"Mademoiselle is just in time," he said. "I go now to Droneton on business for Monsieur. I will attend to Mademoiselle's letter."

"To—to get the coffin?" I faltered.

"No, Mademoiselle. That comes from town to-night on the Charlotte. Cray informs me it was at once procured on the arrival of Mademoiselle's telegram recalling Monsieur with the news. The doctor arrives on this next train—a certificate of death, I believe. It is necessary, *n'est-ce pas?* No undertaker comes, because of Madame's objection. One letter only, Mademoiselle? Ah, yes; I will attend to it."

I returned upstairs, glad that it was to go at once. My room seemed close, although both its windows, and that of my dressing-room, were open. The pink double-window still kept its place, barring my northern outlook and shutting out the air from that side. Philip, in spite of constant reminders, never could find time to order the removal of these new double-windows, although cold weather was long since past.

I leaned from my dressing-room window. The weather seemed about to change. I hoped the sun might shine on the grave the men were digging, up above on the knoll, long enough to accustom Madam to the change. I wished, as I listened to the sound of their spades, that it were big enough for two—that I was to lie down beside dear little Madam, to be, like her, at rest.

"Mademoiselle!" said Mathilde's voice at my elbow. I turned, to see her placing a well-spread tray upon my table. "Monsieur begs Mademoiselle will eat. I was to say that much strength would be needed to-night."

"Who is with Madam?"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Mathilde crossed herself.

"Julie, Mademoiselle. I must return. She fears to be alone."

"And Monsieur?"

"Monsieur is in the library. He is not to be disturbed."

"Is Cray at home?"

"But yes, Mademoiselle."

"Ask him to take Julie's place for a half hour, and send her to me."

Everyone possesses some one charm, it is said. Mathilde's was her stolidity. She obeyed those in authority without question. No wearisome expression of surprise or disapproval ever crossed her lips.

Julie soon appeared.

"I wish to make a toilet befitting Madame's fête, Julie. I need your assistance."

"Madame's fête, Mademoiselle?" she said, doubtfully, her pale face becoming paler still. "Madame's fête?"

"On the hill-top, Julie. It takes place at midnight, when she enters her last home on earth. I am to attend her. I must go as would best please her. Bring the gown I wore on her birthnight. It is brocaded in lilies. It will match her shroud."

Trembling, in silence, the woman obeyed. She wove my hair into a crown of braids and robed me in the splendid ball-gown. Not till she had finished did she speak; then:

"The jewels, Mademoiselle? They were worn before. I am to ask Monsieur?"

"No. Madame prefers not."

Taking my prayer-book, I returned to Madam, dismissing the other watchers.

Slowly the afternoon wore itself away. After an hour in that silent room I felt that my former life with Madam had been a dream. This was the real-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

ity; no sound within save the subdued ticking of the clock, and its chimes when it marked the hours; without, the gentle rustle of young leaves, the occasional twitter of a bird, the hushed step of someone passing beneath the windows.

By and by long shadows fell athwart the room. Night was coming. I sank upon my knees, hiding my face in the coverlet of flowers. We were both so lonely, Madam and I. Why might we not have gone away together?

"Athena!"

Philip bent over me. "Dear child, you will be ill! I heard but a moment ago of your long watch. Come with me. Julie and Mathilde shall stay, while you eat and rest."

I rose, resuming my former place in a chair by the head of the bed.

"I am not hungry, Philip. Please let me stay."

He left the room, returning presently with a cup of bouillon, which he made me drink, saying:

"To please *maman*, Athena!"

He then busied himself about the room, closing the blinds and lighting all the rose-shaded lamps and candles. Lastly he placed great wax-lights at head and foot of the bed, when he withdrew to the veranda, stationing himself just outside the glass door. Until eleven o'clock the quiet was unbroken. Then came the sound of approaching footsteps—the muffled tread of men marching steadily, bearing a burden. Philip ushered them in. I rose to greet them, expecting to see the crew who had long served on the *Charlotte*. To my surprise I was confronted by strangers. In spite of their neat, picturesque sailor dress their appearance was unprepossessing. I thought them an evil-looking set of men.

But I had few thoughts for the changes Philip had made. The moment had come when he and I

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

must lay Madam to rest in the cradle of death. His haggard face, the great drops which beaded his forehead, the tightly pressed white lips, told me that he, too, was remembering her abhorrence of her coffin. Gently, with infinite tenderness, we performed this service. Then I left him for a space with his dead. He must be the last to look upon her.

At midnight we left the house. Julie, with Cray, Mathilde, François, Philip and I, made up the funeral cortège. The night was damp. The stars looked very far away. No moon shone down upon us. The men from the Charlotte carried torches, whose unsteady glare made familiar objects look strange, uncanny. The little procession followed the narrow pathway winding through the woods, to the summit of the knoll. As we passed I caught glimpses of fantastic growths, ferns, red in the torchlight, casting gigantic shadows that looked more real than they, contorted tree-trunks, strangling within serpent-like vine-loopings.

When we reached the place where the path divided I looked to see Randal approach from the door in the boundary wall. He did not come. We went on through the black grove of firs to the open slope on the brow of the hill. The grave was ready.

By the light of the torches Philip read the burial service, steadily, without apparent emotion. His exquisite voice gave added beauty to those words of comforting assurance. Yet, with the awful sound of the earth falling, my courage gave way. Kneeling beside the open grave where lay all that remained to me of my best-loved friend, I sobbed aloud in the anguish of my lonely heart.

Philip lifted me gently to my feet and drew my hand through his arm.

"Come home, poor child," he whispered. "Come home with me. We have done all we can. Come!"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I was grateful for his assistance, as he led me back through the quiet night, to the house, and up the great staircase, to my room. Blinded by tears, exhausted in mind, I needed help. I paused at my door to thank him. He took both my hands in his.

"My poor little girl," he said. "My weary little Athena! The strain has been too prolonged. You need rest and change of scene. You shall have both."

I was glad that he alluded to my going on the morrow. Perhaps it might be well to say good-bye to him at once. He might be as pleased as I to get it over.

"Yes, I shall take the ten-thirty train to-morrow, Philip. Shall we say good-bye now? You will probably be busy in the morning."

He lifted my hands to his lips, kissed first one, then the other, very gently, and, releasing them, said, smiling faintly:

"Go and sleep, my darling! We can talk of your going—in the morning. Here is Julie. Good-night!"

He spoke with her in tones so low I did not hear what he said. I remained where I was, wishing, yet not liking, to insist upon that being my farewell. Then, remembering he held my bank book—with my small savings—and that I must receive the money still due me from his hands, I realized we must meet again.

As Julie brushed my hair I asked if she knew where my trunk, and the clothes I had brought with me to the Hall, were kept.

"But yes, Mademoiselle."

"I am going away to-morrow morning, Julie, and shall rise early to pack. You must be tired, and need not help me. Tell me where I shall find my

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

things, and have my trunk brought in here, please. That will be all."

I glanced, as I spoke, at the reflection of her dark face in the mirror before which I sat. Did I imagine it—could the woman be trying to suppress an amused smile? I remained uncertain.

"I am to attend to everything for Mademoiselle. Monsieur has given me my orders."

I was relieved. So Philip was as anxious to be rid of me as I to go! That was comforting, and I stood in need of comfort of some kind. I was very unhappy—childishly unhappy about dear little Madam. I was unable to realize that she was in Heaven—and safe. I could not banish the disquieting feeling that I had left her to face the cold terrors of her new resting-place, alone. I determined to watch until dawn, already so near. The hall clock had just struck two. But I was young, and very tired. In spite of grief, of my weird fancies, I fell asleep. Sleep brought no peace.

I found myself in a vast swamp with Madam. Everything about me seemed strangely familiar. I felt I had seen its moss-hung trees, its slimy undergrowth, many times before. I thought I was making a painful way for her through a very network of snaky creepers, trailing vines that caught at our feet and held us back. Suddenly these gave place to an open meadow, the grass intensely, unnaturally green. Across this we must run with all speed, for behind us, close behind, came the fierce baying of dogs. I heard Madam cry:

"The bloodhounds are out! They are coming!"

I seized her hand, put my arm around her, dragged her forward. As our hurrying feet touched the rank grasses of the meadow, black mud bubbled up. Too late I knew, that in trying to save, I had destroyed, Madam. We were sinking in a marsh.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Then, on its edge, so close to us, two beasts appeared. We had thought bloodhounds pursued us—these were wolves.

The smaller of the two squatted down lazily, his mouth open, his tongue lolling out. His rows of white fangs, thus exposed, gave him a look as though laughing at us. His expression was strangely familiar. His eyes were blue.

His companion and leader—a supple, powerful creature—seemed bent upon securing his prey. Boldly putting his forepaws upon a hummock close to me he bent his head; his fierce eyes burned into mine. I felt his hot breath on my cheek. The agony was so great I awoke—awoke to find the room bright with morning light—to see Philip Erranti bending over me. Had his lips touched my cheek? Ah, no! I must have waked in time.

“There, there, my darling!” he said, soothingly, in answer to the terror in my eyes, “it is over now. Don’t look so frightened. A bad dream, nothing more.”

“Yes, yes, Philip; but go, please. Oh, pray go!” He looked at me reproachfully.

“You called for help, sweetheart! What could I do but come? It is only half-past six. Try for another nap. You need not breakfast until late. Try to sleep again.”

There was a great tenderness in his eyes.

“If only you would go!”

He smiled indulgently.

“Very well, my Athena! I obey.”

He went into his own room, slipping the great mirror, which concealed the door, back into place. I had forgotten the very existence of this door—I had thought it sealed. The morning train, please God, should carry me away from Highgrove Hall, from its hidden dangers, forever.

XXXIV

The morning was chilly. The sunshine streaming in through my east window had a pale, watery look. It was as if early April had returned.

I had expected to find my trunk outside my door, and on it a package containing the slender wardrobe I had brought with me to Highgrove Hall. Julie knew I wished to pack for myself, but would see that all was in readiness. When, cautiously, through fear of attracting Philip's attention, I peeped into the hall, I found nothing. Disappointed, feverishly anxious to prepare for my journey, I stole softly out, and up to the third story, to seek my belongings.

A new dread of Philip was in my heart. I felt so terribly alone. I, Athena Derohan, was afraid. In vain I tried to overcome my fear. I could not conquer it—it conquered me. I knew I must go through with one more interview, but until then let me escape seeing him, if possible. I went up to the third story and made my search there noiselessly. I found nothing until I reached the trunk-room. To my intense relief my trunk stood in the middle of the floor! Julie had already packed it for me. It was strapped, tagged, ready!

Pleased, greatly relieved, I went in to unstrap its fastenings. There were some things downstairs that must go in. Hardly had I grasped a strap, when it dropped from my hand, still buckled, for lying on the top of the trunk was a letter, addressed in my own handwriting, to Mrs. Welborn. Had François

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

forgotten to post it, after all? Then I saw that there was something bulky inside. I took it up. In one corner of the envelope was written, in my writing:

"Contains trunk key."

I sat down on the floor. I felt odd and faint. My eye fell on the fresh tag fastened to one of the handles. I lifted it. Again, in my handwriting, Mrs. Welborn's name and address, and in the corner this:

"From Mrs. Philip Erranti."

I tore open the letter in my other hand—the trunk key, nothing else. I bent again to the strap. The trunk stood open. It was tightly packed, a strange medley, indeed. My clothes, and with them rolls of silk, shawls, lace-trimmed undergarments, odds and ends. I knew them all. They had formed part of Madam's collection.

I went through each tray as carefully as swiftly, disturbing nothing. I had learned little, so far. The letter-pocket, fastened against the inside lid, caught my attention. I thrust in my hand, drew out an envelope. It was addressed like the other, but was unsealed. In it was a card.

"For Mrs. Stephen Welborn. To be used—or distributed—as she wishes.

"From her friend,

"ATHENA DE ROHAN ERRANTI."

I had sought eagerly for the meaning of the ready-packed trunk. Found, it appalled me. The tenacity with which Philip clung to his purpose roused me to instant action. The interview I had dreaded I now desired. He must know at once that his forgery was discovered—and despised.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Mademoiselle!"

I turned. François stood in the doorway.

"Mademoiselle, breakfast is ready."

I shut and locked the trunk, took its key, and the card I had found in the letter-pocket, in my hand, and followed François swiftly, to confront Philip with my knowledge of his unscrupulous handiwork. The dining-room was empty, but one cover laid.

"Where is Monsieur Erranti?" I demanded.

"Monsieur, Mademoiselle?" said François, drawing out my chair for me. "But he has gone! To town, Mademoiselle, as always."

His shifty eyes glanced meaningly at my place. Following the glance I saw a letter beside it. The address was in Philip's own bold handwriting. The note was as follows:

"Dearest Athena:

"I am forced to leave you for the day. A few tiresome business matters demand instant attention. I shall be with you again by six o'clock. Julie is with me to make a few purchases, articles that she thinks may add to your comfort during our coming voyage.

"May I beg you to remain indoors during my absence? You are sadly in need of rest, my poor darling. Best try for a quiet day. This evening we can discuss our plans for the future.

"Your devoted lover,

"PHILIP."

"Thursday morning."

I refolded this very remarkable letter carefully, and replaced it in its envelope; then turned to the unpleasantly observant butler, and gave my orders.

"I go to town on the 10:30 train. Please order the carriage to be at the house at 9:15. Be good

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

enough, also, to see that my trunk is carried downstairs at that time."

"Mademoiselle has eaten no breakfast!"

François spoke reproachfully, entreatingly, still holding the back of my chair. I sat down and asked for a glass of milk. I had no appetite, yet was faint from long fasting. I sipped the milk slowly, very slowly. Swallowing had, somehow, grown difficult. I stared absently across the table, out through the long window opposite. Suddenly my sense of vision was recalled. A man in sailor dress lounged past, along the veranda. In a moment he repassed the window, with noiseless tread. I recognized him. He belonged to the new crew of the Charlotte.

"Mademoiselle!"

"Yes, François." I wondered at his evident perturbation.

"Mademoiselle, I am very sorry—that note—from Monsieur—" He stopped short, as if finding great difficulty in expressing himself.

"I am waiting, François." I was in haste to be upstairs.

"Monsieur recommends that Mademoiselle awaits his return, *n'est-ce pas?*" said the man, desperately.

"You fear to anger your master by obeying me, François? Then send Cray to me, please."

A sullen expression darkened his hang-dog face. "It will avail nothing!" he said, doggedly. "We have our orders. Mademoiselle is to remain within until the return of Monsieur. If only Mademoiselle would be content to repose herself! She is very safe in Highgrove Hall—well guarded!"

He glanced significantly at the window. The sailor was again passing. Then the shifty eyes for half an instant met mine and—I understood. I was a prisoner!

This full knowledge of my situation, coming

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

suddenly, robbed me of my strength. I sank upon the chair from which I had just risen. François, his frightened expression showing he feared I might faint, gave me quickly a glass of water. After a moment's reflection I asked to see Cray. In the Englishman, who had known me from childhood, I hoped to find an ally. François shook his head.

"If Mademoiselle would but try to comprehend! If she would but consider for a moment! If she would but recall to herself the great fear of Monsieur that possesses the good Cray!—*ma foi!* We all fear him—all! Even, perhaps, Mademoiselle herself!"

He spread out his hands with an air of resignation.

"I must speak with Cray," I insisted. "Since you fear to call him, I will find him myself."

"It is of no use, Mademoiselle. Cray is at the stables, where he is necessary, since all, save one groom only, are sent away. Then, too, Cray would not come did I call him. He fears to see Mademoiselle, he says, in her distress. He must obey Monsieur—he remains, then, at the stables!"

Again I reviewed my chances of escape, for escape I must, before Philip's return. Desperate, I seized the only one that offered.

"And you, François?" I said gently, looking pleadingly into the man's evil face. "Are you willing to see me kept a prisoner? Ah, no; you will help me, I am sure! Help me to get to Droneton, and you shall have every cent I possess."

He did not answer, but stood before me with bent head, listening.

"No one need know," I went on, in low tones; "no one can know, with clever management. Mathilde is upstairs, Cray out of the house. If you will but engage the man on guard in pleasant conversation—over a bottle of wine—I can slip down to the railroad track, and so to Droneton——"

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"And I, Mademoiselle? What then, I ask, becomes of me, François?"

"You will follow before my flight is discovered, François," I said, steadily, "and earn not only my money, but my sincere gratitude."

"Mademoiselle talks like a child," he said, coldly, "forgetting, I think, the temper of Monsieur. He would find me, would beat me to death—or worse! Ah, no! Not such a fool am I as to cross the will of Monsieur for a little money! For look, then, the savings of Mademoiselle are but a trifle—a few hundreds only, *n'est-ce pas?* Not worth a risk so terrible. As for giving pleasure to Mademoiselle"—he laid his hand on his heart, bowing low—"that is different! It desolates me to disoblige her—*mais, que voulez-vous?* I am a mere servant, I, François! The butler of Monsieur! I must obey orders."

I left the room without another word, bitterly regretting that I had so humbled myself. François followed close after, with catlike tread. I paid no attention, but, reaching the top of the great staircase, turned toward that leading to the third story.

"Mademoiselle!"

I stood still.

"The rooms of the third story being locked—Cray now has the keys—Mademoiselle will find herself more comfortable here—or downstairs."

I entered my own room, shutting the door upon his spying face. I was not surprised to see Mathilde seated by my window, busy with her sewing. She rose respectfully.

"A dull day, Mademoiselle!"

"You have orders to remain here with me?"

"But yes, Mademoiselle."

"And why?" I asked, curious to hear what her excuse might be. She made none.

"Monsieur feared to have Mademoiselle alone."

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Why does he fear, Mathilde?"

She raised her eyes from the work she had resumed, to stare at me dully.

"Why, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, why?" I repeated. "Why does he fear to have me left alone? Speak freely, Mathilde; I wish to understand."

After a moment of puzzled silence she spoke—quite freely.

"Mademoiselle is not like others, Monsieur says. Monsieur gave strict orders. 'Watch Mademoiselle carefully. She is not one who threatens what she will do. Mademoiselle acts swiftly—without words. Mademoiselle wishes to leave here. She may not do so to-day. Be respectful. Do not, for one moment, forget the high rank of Mademoiselle; but see to it that she neither harms herself, nor leaves my house.' *Voilà!*'"

She recommenced her stitching, as stolid, as unmoved as before.

I felt the need of employment. Perhaps, with the touch of familiar implements, might come some plan. Needle and thimble might steady my brain, might help it, too, to work swiftly. I begged Mathilde to let me help her, calling a gleam of real pleasure into her dull face. She gave me the strip of muslin, with a smile.

"Mademoiselle embroiders as no one else can," she said; but her gratification did not lead her into forgetting Philip's orders.

Now plying my needle, then fitting restlessly about the house, at times searching for help, for comfort in my Bible, I got through the day. My brain reeled under the strain put upon it, for, no matter what my employment, I still searched eagerly, feverishly—at last desperately—for some plan of escape.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

How should I meet Philip on his return? Should I confront him and sternly denounce his conduct, demanding my freedom? What if that failed!

Should I refuse to see him; then, when midnight came, strive to steal out unseen?

This last plan commended itself to me. The night, thank God, would favor such an enterprise. Long before three that afternoon a heavy mist stole silently up the river from the sea, blotting out the sun. When, at six, I heard the sound of Philip's carriage wheels, the fog hung thick about the walls of Highgrove Hall.

XXXV

"Monsieur has returned, Mademoiselle," said Mathilde. "What robe shall I put out?"

"I shall not change my dress."

"As Mademoiselle pleases."

With folded hands I sat quite still in my easy-chair—waiting.

I thought of my father, of his faith in what he had been pleased to call my "unerring instinct." It had failed me. I did not know what to do. "You're a strange child, Athena," he had often said. "Your instinct's as marvellous as the nose of a good hound. You're not clever, you know, my dear, so never try for the reason of doing anything, but wait till your instinct gives the word, 'go!' Then up and do your best. It's like your fencing, boxing, riding, and the rest. I had you taught the tricks of the trade, but, by Heaven, it's instinct tells you when the moment's come to go in and win! That's what you've got to thank for your success—instinct, my girl!"

The gong sounded in the lower hall. I did not move.

Mathilde, always slow-moving, waited awhile; then, thinking I had not heard, said:

"Dinner is served, Mademoiselle."

"Thank you. I'm not hungry."

Mathilde looked sulky. She had hoped for some hours of freedom. In a few moments what I had expected happened—a gentle knock at the door, Philip's musical voice asking leave to enter. I did not answer. Mathilde ushered him in. I looked at

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

him, bowed slightly in acknowledgment of his presence, but neither rose nor spoke. He at once assumed an air of almost grovelling humility, and held out his hand to me. I turned away my head. His manner, coming after he had acted the jailer all day, was too repulsive in its pretence of innocence.

"Then you are very angry, Athena? How unjust! Surely you won't condemn me unheard?"

"You gave your servants orders to keep me here. What excuse can palliate so gross an insult?"

He stood before me, looking down at me steadily.

What his thoughts were I could not guess, but after a moment his manner changed from one of humility to an air of tender indulgence for the whims of a fretful child. He smiled kindly.

"Come, my pet," he said, "come down to dinner. You're overdone; fatigue has made you fanciful. Don't be cross with me any longer, or look at me with your Medusa look! I swear I don't deserve such treatment. Come, sweetheart!"

Again he held out his hand to help me rise. I did not move. My brain still searched for the best plan to pursue—still found nothing.

"What, angry yet?"—with good-humored reproach. "If you cast such accusing glances much longer, Athena, I'll begin to believe myself the awful ogre you seem to imagine me! Now, I'll make a bargain with you. If you'll come eat your dinner, like a sensible little woman, I'll explain everything to your entire satisfaction."

"My satisfaction!" I said, bitterly.

"Yes, dear child, to your satisfaction. You'll see at once I couldn't have arranged matters otherwise."

"My trunk—my handwriting!"

The irony in my voice stung the color to his face. He looked annoyed, then laughed a little.

"Yes, I can explain everything. If you really

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

want to quarrel with me, sweet, you'd better strengthen yourself for battle by eating your dinner. François tells me you've eaten nothing all day! I really am anxious about you, Athena. You'll do yourself a mischief by this fasting. It's unkind, I think, when you know how it worries me. Come, you must eat something now."

Again he offered his hand. This time I accepted his aid, and, rising, allowed him to lead me—as if I were in truth the petulant child he pretended to think me—downstairs and into the dining-room. An idea had come to me at last. For lack of a better I acted upon it.

François, seeing us enter hand-in-hand, drew out my chair with an almost absurd look of relief, and served me with attentive eagerness.

Realizing that Philip's advice about keeping up my strength was good, I made an effort to eat, but beyond swallowing my soup—my throat contracted oddly—I was unsuccessful. The dinner, I noticed, had been ordered expressly to suit my taste.

"If you would only drink a little wine, my pet," suggested Philip, seeing me refuse every dish, "a glass of champagne! No? Perhaps just a drop of Tokay—but you don't care for sweet things. What can I give you to bring back your appetite?"

"My freedom."

He smiled at me across the table, no shade of embarrassment crossing his handsome face. He was looking remarkably handsome—even for him. The lines of care that Madam's death had brought were gone. His eyes were lustrous, alight with triumphant happiness. His beauty was so resplendent all objects surrounding him seemed colorless, dull. As I looked at him the cold, deadly, silent hate within me grew and grew. My heart had no room for any feeling save this alone.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Such a heavy fog to-night, dear. I never saw one to equal it, inland, before. We shall need a fire in the library. Do you mind the dampness, Athena?"

"No."

Again Philip smiled at me, but he made no further attempt at conversation. He evidently enjoyed his dinner, and found intense satisfaction, apparently, in looking at me. His contemplative, admiring gaze rarely wandered from my face. To this I was well accustomed—it being his habit—and generally thought little about it. I had been stared at all my life. My feelings, however, had suddenly changed. I resented every look, every word, every gesture of the man who had made me his prisoner. I kept my eyes cast down, lest they should reveal this resentment.

Instead of sitting over his wine Philip went with me to the library. There a fire crackled on the hearth. The shaded lamp, the drawn curtains, the great easy-chair in the chimney-corner, gave the room a delightfully cosy look. I allowed my attentive jailer to ensconce me in the easy-chair—it had evidently been placed there for me. He seated himself opposite, a Darby to my Joan, and began his plea.

"Explanations are tiresome, Athena; and, since you insist upon having them, I'll get through as quickly as possible. Women are proverbially quick-witted, so I had hoped you might understand all I wished you to, without any words on the matter. It seems I was mistaken."

He sighed, changed his position, thrust both hands deep down into his pockets, and, turning his eyes away from mine, stared into the fire, as if seeking help there.

Suddenly mindful of the part I had decided to

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

play—wishing very much that dissimulation came more easily—I said, gently:

“Pray smoke, if you wish.”

“Thank you, darling.” Philip spoke gratefully. “It’s sweet of you to remember my tastes when you’re so much displeased! I’ll smoke later—pray Heaven, a pipe of peace! Now for the explanations. I can’t part with you, Athena. I can’t live without you—you belong to me. No, don’t move; hear me out, then abuse me as you will. My plans are made. I shall not change them. You need not ask it. I give you till to-morrow evening to accustom yourself to them—I don’t wish to hurry you too much, beloved. To-morrow evening I shall make you my wife, the next morning, Saturday, set sail in the Charlotte for France. You shall have all I promised, Athena—and more, far more. Not only rest, change of scene, but the joy of knowing you are loved as never woman was loved before!”

“Dreams, Philip, idle dreams! I don’t love you. Think of me as a friend only. I cannot be your wife.”

I spoke calmly, and, I think, appeared at ease, unafraid. But I was fighting down a great dread. Philip rose and began to pace the floor.

“No, not dreams; realities, Athena, as I shall prove. You will be happy as my wife, I feel sure. I’m not asking for your love, only telling you to prepare to go through the marriage service with me—to resign yourself entirely to me. Everything is in readiness. All I ask of you is to acquiesce.”

I sat quite still in my great arm-chair. If only I might pretend to what I did not feel—might, by appearing to yield, blind Philip—in short, if I could but force myself to lie a little! It was so hard, so very hard! Presently his restless walk ceased beside

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

my chair. He knelt, took my unwilling hand, and kissed it passionately.

"My white dove!" he murmured. "My pearl of great price! If only you would come to me willingly!"

"I'm so tired," I said, pettishly, drawing away my hand. "Please leave me alone, Philip! Please go back to your chair and be quiet for a little! I am so very tired."

"Poor little girl! Of course you are tired. So much fatigue and sorrow! I didn't think, or I should not have worried you moving about. It's a bad habit, I know. I'll break myself of it."

"Why did you copy my handwriting, Philip? Who filled my trunk with Madam's things? Why are such strange liberties taken?"

He laughed good-humoredly, inclined, evidently, to make light of my complaints. Sure of holding the winning cards, he was prepared to endure with patience my outburst of wrath. That he expected one was apparent. His relief, I said to myself, would be very great when it failed to come.

"There is an Arabian proverb, Athena," he said, in answer to my questions, "that you should learn. It might help you to understand my feelings. 'Love is like madness, all things are forgiven it.' All things, Athena! Even my folly of last night, when I filled your trunk with things for a woman you have a liking for! When I took a real pleasure in seeing your graceful handwriting grow beneath my pen—when an ecstasy throbbed through my veins as I signed your name as it shall be after to-morrow! 'Love is like madness—all things are forgiven it!' Which means, I take it, not only trivial nonsense like my last night's childishness, but far more. Actions which, but for the passion that prompts them, might savor of crime. 'All things

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

are forgiven it!"—even battle, and murder, and sudden death!"

A silence fell upon the room. Philip was lost in his own strange thoughts; I, fighting my fear, striving for patience. I had planned to sit late in the library, to lull, by my ease of manner, my willingness to remain with him, all suspicion of my design. The clock in the hall struck nine. Instantly I rose, and, as if I had not had a dozen good reasons for behaving quite differently, acted upon instinct, as always.

"I am so tired," I complained, a half sob jarring through my words, "and you are so unkind!"

Philip sprang from his chair, looking greatly distressed. Again kneeling beside me he gazed imploringly into my face, bewildered. Never before had he heard my voice raised in self-bewailing.

"Don't speak like that, my darling!" he cried. "You break my heart. What can I do to please you? I'll do anything, everything—save let you leave me. That you must not ask."

"I'm not asking anything," I said, still almost in tears, "save to be let alone. You worry me so! You insist upon my thinking, thinking, till my head is on fire. How can I sleep with my brain in this dreadful whirl? How can I believe you care for me when you're so selfish? Oh, I am so weary—body and soul!"

I pushed him aside, and, going to the chimney-piece, rested my arms upon it and my face on them. I prayed for strength to carry out my plan as I hid my eyes with their tell-tale expression, for I might not control their look of dread and hatred.

Although it had sometimes suited Philip's purpose to treat me as a whimsical child, he had never seen me petulant. An irritable, unreasonable Athe-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

na Derohan was new to him. He stood before me silent, uncertain—non-plussed.

Seeing the advantage gained I acted upon it. Pressing my handkerchief to my eyes I said:

"I think I will say good-night—that is, if you will allow me! Even you, I suppose, won't deny me the poor privilege of trying to rest."

Sighing deeply I moved languidly toward the door, my head bent, my every weary movement accusing him of brutality.

"Athena!" he cried out. "Don't leave me with your heart so full of bitterness! I'm not the brute you think me; I'm not, I swear! Don't judge me so harshly, Athena!"

"You won't let me rest," I said, piteously. "I feel as though I could never sleep—you've worried me so!"

"I have something that will make you sleep, dearest," he spoke, eagerly. "Let me prescribe for you——"

I shook my head.

"I can't believe in your nostrums, Philip. Poor little Madam! My head whirls like hers, to-night."

"I'll give you what she used to take—*pauvre petite maman*. You're not afraid of her simple drops, Athena?"

"No-o. You're sure you have some, Philip?"

To convince me, he made me go with him to his room and watch him take the well-known medicine-chest from a cabinet. With my own hands I was allowed to draw from its place the little bottle that I had myself, so short a time ago, half filled with water! I mixed my dose myself and carried it carefully to my room.

"You promise to take it, my Queen?" asked Philip from the doorway.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"Yes. I shall be glad to."

"You will sleep sound all night, never fear! Mathilde shall sleep near you, in case you should wake before light and feel frightened"—this meant I was still guarded—"unless you prefer Julie. But she is in a bad temper. I warn you——"

"Mathilde will do as well, Philip."

"You're not angry now, my dearest?"

"Ah, please, Philip!"

"Lay your hand in mine, Athena, in token of peace."

I forced myself to yield, to repress a shiver as he kissed it.

"Good-night, my heart's treasure, my own love!"

"Good-night."

Mathilde's sleeping powers were wonderful. Once asleep it took much to rouse her. She brought me the innocuous sleeping-draught when I was in bed, and, sitting down by the fire, she fixed her eyes on my face to watch, stolidly, until I should fall under its influence. I tossed restlessly for a few moments, then, guessing that she would judge me by herself, pretended to become a log of insensibility. Convinced that the drug had done its work she went to the door and whispered:

"Monsieur!"

"She is asleep?"

It was Philip's voice. I knew that he must have remained prowling about the hall, waiting. What new trial of strength was coming? He entered, and, with Mathilde, approached my bedside. It was a hard ordeal. Mathilde a child might have deceived—but Philip? I strove to breathe regularly, naturally, as if peacefully asleep. Through closed lids I seemed able to see the dark face bending close to mine.

"But no, Monsieur!" came a quick whisper from

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Mathilde, fearing for her own night's rest. "Should she wake now she may not sleep again!"

One of my braids hung down across my pillow. Did I feel, or but imagine, a touch upon it?

"My darling!" murmured Philip. "My pure white lily! My innocent dove! May God's own angels guard thy rest!"

"Monsieur!"

Again Mathilde was remonstrating, this time successfully, as, after a whispered consultation, I heard the door closed gently. Philip was gone. Mathilde began to rustle comfortably about the room, happy in being rid of her master. I heard her softly patting the pillows on the lounge she was to occupy, then arranging the light to suit her taste. I ventured to peep at her through my eyelashes. She had taken off her cap, but otherwise was fully dressed. This, and the position of the lounge, which had been drawn out to command a view of me, told me she was expected to sleep with one eye open. I wondered at Philip's precautions when he thought me drugged, then wondered at myself for expecting to understand him.

So began the hours of waiting. After midnight I should try to escape; until then, patience! Thus far I had succeeded. I had obtained the sleeping-mixture I had tried for—surely Madam herself had helped me. Now, I could but pray for aid, for guidance—and wait.

The house was very silent. Save for the gentle snoring of Mathilde, the many clocks calling to each other from every room that time was passing, and the whispering of the wood-fire as it smouldered on the hearth, not a sound! Outside the fog muffled the night rustlings of woodland and garden, the twitter of half-awakened birds, the light snapping of some twig;—all sounds were smothered under the heavy mist,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON.

At eleven came the clanking of Peggy's chain, as Cray fastened her to the great safe by Philip's door, and her thud of contented settling down for the night; then, once more, silence.

I lay motionless, thinking, thinking;—sometimes remembering stories of others who, like me, innocent of crime, had endured what I was enduring—and inhuman treatment besides. Then, resolutely turning away from history's teachings, striving to forget the miseries of those who had died in prison, of those whose sufferings made mine as nothing, I set to replanning every detail of my flight, until the nervous strain of waiting became too great, and I drove my thoughts backward into the past, for a time successfully, reliving hours of my childhood, forgetting my danger, my present surroundings, in the joy of recalling scenes passed with my parents—remembering their every gesture, every word. Then, with a sickening pang in my heart, my mind would swing back. With redoubled terror I stared at the familiar objects surrounding me—the silken curtains garlanded with lilies, the "*articles de luxe*" on the dressing-table, the weight of luxury everywhere, and, on the lounge, the sleeping sentry. So the night wore on—twelve, half-past, one o'clock——

I crawled stealthily from the bed, drew its coverings to the pillows, that it might be thought occupied, took from a chair my cashmere dressing-gown, and stole softly past Mathilde. I reached my dressing-room, closed the door noiselessly after me, slipped the bolt. Not a sound from the room I had left! I put on a few clothes—I dared not attempt dressing thoroughly—slipped into the dressing-gown, drew on a pair of stockings, extinguished the night-lamp, and, opening the great French window, crept out upon the veranda roof.

The night was intensely dark. Once on the shed the pall of fog, so thick it felt like rain, enveloped

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

me. The drawn blinds inside the closed shutters of my room prevented a ray of light from escaping. I had nothing to guide me as, feeling each inch of the way, I crawled slowly to the edge of the wet, slippery roof. That reached, I lay flat, and stretched my arm over and under, feeling for one of the iron trellises, which must serve as a ladder. Once down, I meant to go to Mr. Beverley and demand his protection. He would help me to reach the Welborns in safety—defend me from Philip. I felt I had a right to ask this at his hands, that any gentleman, knowing what threatened, would hasten gladly to my aid.

The open air restored my composure. The need of muscular exertion steadied my nerves. The knowledge that far below lay the brick pavement of the kitchen area, that losing my balance and falling meant death, gave me comfort. The roof, covered with stuff that felt like canvas, made no sound. The tin-lined gutter at its edge was half full of water, deadening its crackings.

My long peignoir wound about my feet, impeding every motion. My hands, covered with slimy moisture from the roof, began to slip dangerously. Suddenly my clammy fingers touched a spray of dripping leaves. I had found a trellis. Twisting about I flattened myself, bat-like, on the roof, and, backing cautiously, began to lower myself over the edge. Inch by inch, every muscle strained and tense, I descended into space, my feet fumbling for the trellis. Presently I hung by my hands alone—one slipped, ah!—a great effort—swinging forward I caught, with both hands and feet, the twisted iron. It creaked beneath my weight, its vines showering down wet leaves, great drops. I clung, and held my breath—listening! I thought I heard a faint sound below on the veranda. I waited; my heart filled the universe with the noise of its throbbing.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

By and by I grew calmer, ventured to descend. I had been mistaken, no one was near.

This certainty sent a thrill of rapture, of exultation tingling through me. I tried not to injure the vine that shared its support so generously, thrusting my feet, in their drenched stockings, carefully among its delicate branches. Its tendrils caught my braids; I freed them gently. At last my foot touched the veranda. I swung myself around to the inside of the trellis. I was free!

I turned—two strong arms closed around me. The cry of despair that rose to my lips was smothered against a man's breast—Philip's!

XXXVI

Lifting me as easily as if I had been a child, Philip carried me along the veranda—around the corner of the house—to the library window. It was open, but the curtain drawn close to conceal the lamplight. Still holding me he shut and bolted the window after us, then, touching my hair and shoulders, exclaimed:

“As I supposed—wet through! You must be got to bed at once. Come!”

He spoke sternly, and half led, half carried me through the room and across the dimly lighted hall, where the marble pillars—rows of shadowy ghosts—seemed all standing on tiptoe to see the runaway pass.

I had made no effort to escape,—neither struggled, cried for air, nor begged to be released. My mind, exhausted by unwonted effort, was nearing collapse; but enough sense remained to tell me that, for the present, I must submit. Only the deadly fear of losing consciousness—for an odd stupor was stealing upon me—prevented my doing so. At the foot of the staircase when, grasping the balustrade, I strove to mount unaided, this sensation of faintness became so intense that I reeled and must, but for Philip, have fallen. Again lifting me in his arms he carried me up the stair, murmuring, as he pressed me tenderly to him:

“Foolish child, when will you cease struggling against your fate? Do you know what torture you

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

have inflicted upon me to-night? I swear it shall never happen again—never, never!”

The sensual face of the Venus above the landing seemed to gleam with a smile of triumph as I was carried past. Her heavy-lidded eyes stared down upon me contemptuously. Fierce hatred struck through my stupor like a sword. I knew that my pallor, my stained garments, my hair heavy with fog gave her a vindictive pleasure—as I also knew suddenly that my hatred of this white Venus was an old hatred, an instinct born in me, a strange inheritance.

Carrying me into my room Philip placed me in an easy-chair close to the hearth, and kneeling before me rekindled the dying fire. Then turning his attention to Mathilde, who still slept heavily, he took the carafe of water from my table and deliberately poured its contents full on her face. With a cry of terror she started up, staring about her with frightened, sleep-dulled eyes.

“Don’t you see that your mistress is wet, you fool?” shouted Philip. “Get her dry things—bestir yourself!”

Stolidly, moving like an automaton, she obeyed; and her master, taking what she brought from her fiercely, himself hung the things before the fire.

“Dress your mistress while I rouse Julie,” he commanded. “She must take your place—you’re not to be trusted.”

Awake at last Mathilde hurried me out of my bedraggled dressing-gown into the lace-trimmed tea-gown, and replaced my wet stockings with dry ones. Hardly had she accomplished this when Philip was back again, entering without the ceremony of knocking, a circumstance that, penetrating to my almost torpid brain, restored a fraction of my will-power. Striving to rouse myself I fixed my eyes upon him

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

as, leaning his elbow on the chimney-piece, he steadily returned my gaze. His expression was unpleasant—cold, composed, determined, his eyes alight with cruel enjoyment of his power, of my failure and his success. Unable to sustain his glance my lids dropped—I looked at the fire rather than at him. He laughed.

“Leave the room,” he said to Mathilde, who was trying to open the door of my dressing-room. “That door is bolted on the inside, you fool! It can be opened later. Go downstairs; go to bed! You’re not wanted longer—go!”

I made an effort to rise and follow as she left the room.

“Sit still, you silly child.”

Laying his hand on my shoulder he pushed me back into my chair. As he did so one of my braids slid against his fingers.

“Still damp!” he exclaimed, impatiently. “That woman is too incompetent!”

He went to the chiffonière, rummaged through its drawers until he found my handkerchiefs, and putting them in my lap for his better convenience, drew up a chair and began to unbraid my hair, preparatory to drying it.

“No, no,” I remonstrated, frowning, trying to draw the long braid from his grasp, “don’t touch me! I wish to be alone.”

“You’ll take cold,” said Philip, coolly. “Your hair is still wet from the fog. If you insist upon indulging in mad escapades you must take the consequences.”

As he tried to continue his self-imposed task I caught his hand.

“I was to have until to-morrow evening—I have your promise—I was to be—to be unmolested—to be given time——”

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I spoke with difficulty, breathlessly.

Philip smiled.

"Because of my promise I am to let you take cold?"

"Julie will attend to me—I have your word, Philip."

"Yes, I have treated you tenderly, Athena, and you have taken advantage of this to throw dust in my eyes. Women are all alike! From Eve to Athena Derohan, the very same!" He spoke scornfully, a look of thinly veiled contempt in his eyes. "Until little over an hour ago I was idiot enough to imagine that you were different! To believe you as unlike other women in your inability to act a lie, as in your marvellous beauty. Annoyed by the trumpet-like snores of Mathilde I came in to guard the slumber of my angel from disturbance—and found her nest empty!" He laughed, then said, sneeringly, "Found that my Pearl among women was as deceitful as her sisters—a pleasant discovery, truly."

Forgetting my hair, holding my hand firmly in both his, he stared at me with the severity of a judge lecturing a culprit. His point of view, strange, unaccountable, left me dumb. How reason with such unreason?

"Did you think, you little fool, that I should leave you entirely in the care of that stupid French-woman? Did you imagine that your ridiculous attempt at flight would remain long undiscovered? You think me cruel—I know that well. What were you to-night, pray, when you condemned me to endure moments, nay, hours, of anguish while you were amusing yourself risking life and limb on that damned roof? I saw your bed empty—found the door of your dressing-room was locked, and guessed the rest. What is it to you that I stood below

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

on the veranda straining eyes and ears to see, to hear, every muscle on the alert to catch you should you fall? I tell you it was agony! I am a strong man, not deficient in nerve, but I swear to you my fear was so great, the strain so intense, that cold sweat rolled in great drops off my forehead! But do you care? Not a bit! If Don gets a thorn in his paw your tender heart is wrung; but for the man who would sell his soul to the devil to get you a bauble you fancied—for him you have no feeling!"

"Till to-morrow night—I was to be given till to-morrow night."

"So be it," he said, shortly. "I will keep my word."

"Your oath." I doubted him. "Swear that you give me till then."

He smiled strangely, laid his right hand on my head, and said:

"By this golden head, my dearest treasure, I swear to keep my word!"

"No, Philip! Swear by Madam's grave——"

He paled to the lips under his dark skin.

"By the grave of *petite Maman*!"

I believed at last.

He rose, releasing my hand, and stood looking down upon me.

"Julie is coming. You will be safe with her. I shall expect to see you at dinner to-morrow evening—but no, this evening. The dawn of your wedding-day is close at hand!"

I remained silent.

"I give you until ten in the evening to make up your mind to become my wife."

I did not speak.

"The time has come for me to speak plainly, Athena. Should you refuse to behave sensibly—in short, should you refuse to go through the marriage

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

service, you shall belong to me just the same. This—I also swear.” He stooped, took my face between his hands, looked deep into my eyes. “Julie guards you to-night. To-morrow night I shall be with you, as your husband—or your lover. It is for you to choose.”

He kissed me on the lips and left the room.

His wicked words disgusted but failed to terrify me. The moment the door closed upon him my brain yielded to its fatigue. Philip and his threats faded from my mind. I was conscious only of being tired, so very tired, and of having gained some hours in which to rest.

Julie, hard-eyed and grumbling, helped me to bed, and I sank into a heavy sleep that lasted fully six hours. It was nine o'clock in the morning when I opened my eyes, waked by the sound of my own laughter! Julie stood at the bedside, watching me curiously. I stared at her in dismay. It was hard to come back to the awful reality of life, after my happy dream.

I had been in the old barn back of our Long Island farm-house. Its wide doors stood open, letting in broad rays of sunshine, the crisp sea-breeze, the scent of new-mown hay. On the dusty floor a square was marked off in lines of chalk—a space of twenty feet or so. In it I stood, facing my father, not the worn man of later years, but the cheerful companion of my childhood, gay, bright-eyed, debonair. I listened to his kind voice, his light-hearted laughter, and to his advice. This last, because of its absurdity—how might I ever need such advice?—amused me so that I laughed aloud, and my dream was over. But at sight of Julie's dark face I laughed no longer. I found the counsel of my dead father good.

“Will Mademoiselle breakfast in bed or rise?”

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I said I would get up.

"For you, Mademoiselle," giving me a small box and a note. "Monsieur has gone to town for the day. He returns at six, as usual. He wished you to receive this immediately on waking—*voilà!*"

I broke the seal languidly—more insults couched in flowery language probably, but they must be read. Each move of the enemy was important.

"Dearest Athena:

"I spoke roughly, coarsely, last night. I forgot myself. I beg your pardon. Let me assure you that whatever may be your decision I shall from henceforth look upon, treat you, as my much-loved and honored wife.

"It is but natural that I should wish our marriage to be lawful, but you shall decide. With or without the sanction of the Church I shall regard the tie as sacred. Later you will consent, if not now, to our union being made legal.

"May I see this ring on your lovely hand when I return? I shall regard it as a token of your forgiveness.

"Your devoted

"PHILIP.

"HIGHGROVE HALL,

"7.30 A.M.,

"Friday morning."

In the little box was the ring. A splendid diamond set in diamonds! He must always gild the lily, I thought, staring absently at the mass of flashing gems. The ring was heavy. A sudden thought moved me to slip it on my finger.

"Not the fourth finger of the right hand," exclaimed Julie; "of the left, Mademoiselle!"

I balled my hand into a fist. The diamonds rose

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

sparkling above the knuckles. Yes, it was a very heavy ring. I drew it off, replaced it in its box, and told Julie to put it away, anywhere.

"You will not wear it, Mademoiselle?"

"Not now, Julie."

"When Monsieur returns, perhaps?"

"Perhaps, Julie."

I rose, to begin another long day of waiting. The fog still held. The house was dark and gloomy. I neither worked nor read to divert my thoughts—I had none. My mind was worn out seeking a solution to my problem. I let it rest, forced it no longer. I was not a thinking woman, why strive to change my nature? At the last I might know what to do—
not until then.

A little after noon, weary of my own room, I went downstairs. François, reading a newspaper near the front door, rose and bowed low as he said:

"At present the library is in use, Mademoiselle, but I may enter if a book is desired."

"Who is there, François?" I asked, idly—what did any household arrangement really matter to me? But his answer set my pulses throbbing:

"Monsieur Randal St. John."

I was saved! With a prayer of thanksgiving filling my heart to bursting I turned to seek the help I felt sure of receiving. François stopped me.

"One moment, Mademoiselle! Monsieur St. John is in communication with Monsieur Erranti! They speak together through the telephone—a remarkable instrument, *n'est-ce pas?* If Mademoiselle desire, I will inform Monsieur St. John of her wish to speak with him?"

François, then, was willing to aid me through another!

"Yes, please, François," I said, gratefully.

He knocked at the closed door and gave my mes-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

sage, while I, my heart beating so violently that I could scarcely breathe, sank upon a divan opposite and waited. Randal did not keep me waiting long. I heard him laugh, heard him call out to someone as he opened the door:

"That's over, thank the Lord!"

I saw Cray hurry past the large hall window, then Randal appeared, crossed the hall to me. I rose, going swiftly to meet him.

"Randal!" I cried, under my breath, calling him by his first name without knowing. "Randal! Thank God, you have come in time!"

"How are you?" he said, gayly; "but I needn't ask—always as beautiful as a dream. May I be the first to offer congratulations, dear Mrs. Erranti?"

He held out his hand, smiling. His cheeks were flushed, he was excited. I thought he had been drinking.

We stood by the statue of Fortune. François had disappeared. We were quite alone, and could speak without fear of being overheard, yet I was silent, so strangely sinister was Randal's expression, so unfriendly his cruel smile.

"I've just done much to earn your thanks, dear lady," he continued, "as much as if I'd been a match-making mamma! For I have married you, a beautiful, well-born, but penniless girl, to a rich man who adores you——"

In my astonishment I found my voice, and, interrupting him, begged he would cease jesting.

"I am in very great trouble. I am a prisoner here. Mr. Erranti won't let me go—and threatens me. Oh, Randal! I saved your life—now save mine!"

I laid my hand appealingly on his arm. His ugly smile deepened.

"Why, I've already done better for you than you

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

did for me! You merely pulled me out of the bounding billow and I—have put money in your purse. Come, sit down, and I'll tell you all about it."

I did not move—my agitation was over. I would take whatever was coming, standing.

"I've played the part of heavy father as well as match-making mamma—and that of witness into the bargain! I'm like the chap in Thing-um-bob's poem:

‘For I,’ quoth he, ‘am a Captain bold
And the mate of the Nancy Brig——’

but I see I'm boring you. I'll come to the point." He smiled again. He was enjoying himself. "I went to town with your husband this morning. The poor old chap was awfully upset over the affair—didn't say much, but anyone could see he was worried no end, hated to 'force your inclinations,' so to speak, and so on. Remembering that you were to have married my cousin," affecting to feel deeply moved, "and, as you just kindly reminded me, that you had once saved my life, I naturally felt inclined to do you a good turn, as well as to help Erranti out of a hole—killing two birds with one stone! So I made a rather clever suggestion, which, if properly carried out, would make you rich and Erranti happy without any unpleasant fuss. I hate a row. So back I came, and, with Cray at my elbow, stationed myself at the telephone. Erranti got a clergyman and two lawyers for witnesses—bound to have law on his side—and went to his telephone—and so they were married!"

He spread out his hands with a languid gesture of finality. He had explained.

"Who were married?"

My voice astonished me, for it rang firm.

"My dear Mrs. Erranti!"—my lack of intelligence

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

pained and surprised Mr. St. John—"you were married! I admire you so much I was glad to relieve you of the fatigue of repeating the answers in that tedious ceremony, the marriage service. I took your part, I made your vows for you through the telephone, I gave you away—because of what might have made us cousins! Then, with Cray, I served as witness. Dear lady, don't thank me—I was but too happy to be of use. Though you think I have done a great deal for you, don't overwhelm me with your gratitude!"

Languidly graceful, smiling, pleasantly excited, he looked at me, triumphantly conscious of having played successfully for high stakes. Philip would pay well and—he hated me.

"You have indeed done a great deal," I said, quietly; "more than you know; more, I believe, than any man born under the Stars and Stripes has ever done. You have married a white gentlewoman, a woman of your own race and class, to what I understand is called—a mulatto."

He stared at me incredulously, his languor gone; then cried out roughly:

"That's a damned lie!"

"It is God's truth! Philip Erranti is the son of Madam's husband and a slave."

An ugly pallor chased the bright color of pleasant excitement from his face.

"It can't be true!" he said, huskily. "I won't believe it!"

Yet he did believe. At the moment of his denial memory of the many peculiarities, studied closely, came to him. He recognized the truth.

"Madam told me on her death-bed. Yes, you have done much—have done that which, when it is known, will make you an outcast, a pariah! Every decent man and woman will shrink from you with

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

loathing! Every respectable member of the colored race will thank God he is not akin to you——”

He took out his handkerchief and wiped away the moisture beading his forehead, his face ashen, his white lips twitching nervously.

“I swear to God I didn’t know it, Athena! How could I know such a hellish secret? Damn him, for keeping it so well!”

“You may save me yet; it’s not too late! Take me to your uncle, now, this moment. They will let you pass. Mr. Beverley will help us both!”

“Damned rot! Much you know about my uncle—it would ruin me. Anyway, it couldn’t be done; the men on watch have their orders. I couldn’t get you through. I’m in it up to my neck, curse him, and so are you. Why the devil you didn’t get out of here before, I’m damned if I can see! You’re a woman; you might have known what was coming!—But you were always so infernally sure of yourself. A nigger! A damned slave-girl’s bastard! And he’s got me by the throat! I wish to the Lord he was dead!”

“Kill him, then,” I whispered, eagerly, “and save me!”

“Kill him?” echoed Randal, faintly, eying me with horror. “Kill Erranti? But it would be murder!”

“You dare hesitate, after what you have done to me?”

“That’s different,” dabbing his face with his scented handkerchief; “very different! I can’t soil my hands with blood—it’s too horrible.”

I looked at him with cold contempt. I loathed him.

“What are stained hands to such as you, Randal St. John? Your soul is smirched, your honor gone. If you shoot this man and save me, whom you have

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

injured, from dishonor, you do the one thing that may redeem you."

He shook his head. He looked sickly, old.

"Then you give me up?"

"I've got to," he spoke, sullenly. "I can't help myself. I'm in for it, and so are you. We've got to make the best of it. You'll have lots of money—later you can divorce him."

"You Judas!" I whispered, retreating from him. "You have sold me! You are worse than Philip! Rather the tiger than his jackal!"

He tried to stop me, begged me to stay with him, said he might not go home, as he was supposed to be in town, that he could not, would not, be left alone. I did not answer; but, hastening to my room, closed the door upon him, upon the pollution of his coward presence.

"Will Mademoiselle lunch here, or below, with Mr. St. John?" asked François later; and showed no surprise when I said:

"Here, please."

I felt I must eat strengthening food, since much strength might be needed.

XXXVII

The luncheon served me was excellent, if a little odd. Nothing requiring the use of a knife was there. Then I remembered that the same omission had been arranged for at breakfast as well. I had taken nothing since waking save a glass of milk, but my appetite had deserted me. I was faint, but not hungry, and disposing of one dainty sandwich and a cup of bouillon was a serious and difficult matter, since the act of swallowing had become a pain. This duty done, I began again to wait—for what I did not know, calling it simply, to myself, "The end."

I did not trouble myself as to the possible legality, or illegality, of the so-called marriage. Randal, with his powers of mimicry, had probably used my voice in answering for me through the telephone; but I did not know if this bit of acting had been necessary. I neither knew, nor cared very much, if a marriage had been so performed before, if telephones might be used for such a purpose. Completely ignorant, I was content to remain so. Married or not, Philip would carry out his plans. Living or dead, I should foil them. But I come of a fighting race. The long hours of waiting, of enforced inaction, bred despair. Kneeling by my bedside, my cheek pressed close to the worn cover of my prayer-book, I repeated over and over again parts of the Litany, and so felt less alone. It seemed to me that I heard the soft murmur of other voices

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

lifted in prayer—the voices of those who had sought help, and found consolation, in this general supplication, where all may find their special plea.

“That it may please Thee to succor, help, and comfort, all who are in danger, necessity, and tribulation.”

And the unseen souls then whispered fervently:

“We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord.”

So the afternoon passed, dark, dreadful. The fog still clung about the house—as if it might remain always, to shut it away, with its evil atmosphere, from the world of honest folk. Not a breath of wind was stirring. Within was the dulness of despair; without, the deadening pall of mist!

I had fallen into a semi-stupor, unconscious of all save my own anguish, when I was roused by Julie’s metallie voice. At first I scarcely heard her words, and remained kneeling, my arms flung out across the silken counterpane, my set, white face hidden. No tears had come in my despair—I had long passed the tears of self-pity.

“Will you dress now—Madame, or later?” she repeated, lingering caressingly upon the word that made a dainty morsel for her cruel lips.

I rose and faced her.

“Now.”

She fell back a pace, staring. Vague alarm came creeping into her hard eyes. I looked at the clock. Its hour-hand pointed to six.

“Make haste, please. I am in a hurry.”

“But Monsieur is just arrived,” raising her eyebrows. “He too, must dress for dinner.”

I looked at her steadily.

“You fail to understand? Then pay attention. I wish to dress at once—and quickly. I shall wear the white satin—the plain one.”

“But Madame!” she remonstrated. “It fits so

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

badly! It is much, much too loose, too big! And old—and plain!”

“Must I send for Monsieur to enforce my orders?”

Indignant, but no longer daring to disobey, she did not speak until my toilet was finished; then, surveying me with angry disapproval, she said:

“It is most unsuitable. Monsieur will be displeased.”

“You think it unbecoming?”

“*Mais non*—” hesitating, “with that coiffure—that low knot, so simple—the strange resemblance to a statue of marble, that has always been, even when Madame was a child. There is a lack of gayety, a something I know not what—a something oppressive—but the jewels may alter this appearance. Behold them, then!”

With the importance of one about to show something remarkable, Julie placed before me a handsome jewel-box, and, opening it, took out a magnificent set of diamonds.

“Madame Erranti’s—reset,” she explained, holding up each ornament, in turn, to be admired; “and many new stones added!”

“They are very handsome. Bring me the diamond ring, please; these you may put away.”

“You will not wear it—or these?” she asked, as I slipped the ring into my pocket. Intense contempt was in voice and eyes. Clearly I disgusted her.

“You think my hair, my throat, my arms, need ornaments, Julie?”

“It is as Madame pleases,” she said, sullenly. “Madame is, of course, very proud of her beauty. It is natural after Monsieur’s devotion, the blind worship he shows. It is to be supposed Madame would consider her shoulders more beautiful without adornment! The less covered—the more seen—

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

the better, *ma foi!* Therefore, they remain bare—like marble, and as cold! Perhaps the old satin, as loose, as ill-fitting as that Madame wore as a child for her fencing, her exercises, is now worn to show she is superior to *la toilette!* Ah, *ciel!* Madame's mother, she would have robed herself in the new dress of lace, the veil, the diamonds, troubling not from whom they came or——”

“Hush!”

Julie shrank back. By nature hard and insolent, she yet seemed afraid.

“Never dare take that name upon your lips again,” I said, quietly, almost under my breath. “My mother is a saint in heaven, and you—you travel toward hell!”

I left the room and went downstairs. It was half-past six. I had no wish to wait until Philip came for me. I was quite ready to meet him and my fate. I crossed the hall to the library. I heard voices there. The door stood half open. I saw Philip and Randal standing together, before the desk. Neither noticed my approach. Philip's back was toward me, Randal absorbed in watching him. As I paused for a second Randal said:

“Yes, he's quiet enough in appearance, I grant; but he's not the sort you imagine. If he knew half the truth he'd have your life!”

A mocking laugh, low, musical, was the only reply. A deep flush swept over Randal's pale face.

“He would—if he hung for it!” he said, sharply.

“Messieurs, I bid you good-evening!”

At the sound of my voice both men started violently. Randal thrust something hastily into his breast pocket.

“The pieces of silver,” I asked, “or have I brought you gold?”

Before I had finished speaking the man who called

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

himself my husband had taken my hand in his and kissed it.

"You have come to me of yourself, my darling! God bless you for your sweet trustfulness." Then, lifting my left hand, "Where is your betrothal ring?"

"It did not please me," I said, calmly. "I wish one of a different kind."

Philip stared at me, puzzled, anxious.

"You shall choose for yourself, sweetheart. Whatever you wish you shall have. And now," he said, humbly, "may I slip on this slender finger the golden circlet that means my Heaven?"

"Not now, please, Philip."

He looked disappointed, but smiling said that he would wait my pleasure, and led me to a chair.

Something in my appearance or manner seemed to have cast a spell over Randal. He had not taken his eyes off me since my entrance, and when I sat down he took a chair opposite, moving as though in a dream, and continued staring at me as before. I wondered what his thoughts were. Might I, at the eleventh hour, find a champion? He should have a chance to patch up his shattered honor.

"You wear no jewels, Athena," said Philip. "Have they failed, like the ring, to suit your taste? They can easily be altered."

"You would have liked me better in the diamonds?" I asked, looking not at him but at Randal. "I do not please you—as I am?"

"Please me? What a question from a bride to her bridegroom! From you to me!"

He flung himself on his knees at my feet, and seizing my cold hands devoured them with kisses. Not caring for Randal's presence—perhaps forgetful of it—he made no effort to disguise his mad passion. I looked across his bent head and saw the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

pale face of the man opposite turn paler, saw him half rise from his chair, then sink back again with a groan.

"Philip," I said, gently, "I will tell you what ring I wish. Perhaps you may care to get it for me."

He looked at me with eyes that shone. He was intoxicated with happiness—thinking he had conquered. Rising with the light, lithe grace of a panther, he seated himself beside me and bade me command him.

"You shall have it if it costs the half of my fortune," he cried, again possessing himself of my hands. "My darling, my queen, my wife! Where can I find this ring, Athena? Tell me, and it is yours."

"The person who now wears it"—I spoke serenely—"will doubtless be quite willing to part with it for—a good price. He has already sold two jewels of such inestimable value that this must seem a mere bagatelle——"

"I understand you, Athena," cried Randal, rising to his feet as if stung into life; "but I'm damned if you shall succeed!"

Philip turned angrily upon him, rising in his turn.

"Come to yourself!" he said, sharply. "Remember where you are—and who you are! I permit no man to swear in my wife's presence, nor to call her by any name save mine. To you she is Mrs. Erranti. Don't forget yourself again!"

"Madame is served," said a colorless voice.

François stood on the threshold, a picture of the perfect servant, who sees and hears nothing. Philip and Randal ceased glaring at each other like angry wolves about to spring. The latter, as guest, offered me his arm and led me in to dinner. I was sick with disappointment. If only, for ten minutes longer, François had stayed away!

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

The dinner was, as always at Highgrove Hall, perfect, the wines the best to be had and lavishly served. As had, of late, been my custom, I took soup only. Because of this it had been made as nourishing as possible. I felt refreshed after a few spoonfuls. As quietly as usual I filled my place at the head of Mr. Erranti's table, yet the three men, master, man, and the one guest, watched me constantly, and had each an expectant look. Philip's handsome face wore the expression of an eager lover, but what was the meaning of Randal's anxious glance? Of François's furtive air of dread?

"About your ring, my darling?" said Philip, when, the second course being over, François was about to serve the third. "You haven't told me yet what it's to be—or did you say it was in the possession of someone already?"

Randal, who had been drinking heavily, raised a brimming bumper to his lips, and set it down empty. He looked sullen, harassed by painful thoughts. Save for a pink spot high on either cheek, his face was ghastly. I remembered the dinner with the two Englishmen, the conversation about negroes, Randal's remarks, the broken wine-glass—was he, too, remembering?

"The person who owns the ring would give it willingly did he know I wanted it, Philip."

"I can't give it to you, Miss Derohan," exclaimed Randal, fiercely, "and you know it! It's not mine to give."

Whether he had called me by my own name to annoy Philip, or merely through forgetfulness, I could not tell. Philip looked at him keenly, but before he could speak I answered:

"It is Mr. Beverley's ring, I know. Mr. Thorpe sold it to him for me."

"For you, Athena?" exclaimed Philip, in surprise.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"It was my mother's ring," I said, gravely, "then mine. Now I wish for it. Mr. St. John has forfeited his right. He has failed to keep the conditions. He was to give up gambling. Come, Mr. St. John, give me the ring! Your uncle would be willing—come!"

"Are you crazy?" cried Randal. "You know quite well I can't! If he missed it from my finger there'd be the very deuce to pay! I believe you want to ruin me."

"I want the ring," I said, steadily, and looked at Philip.

"Name your price, Randal! I won't haggle about the matter. Give Athena her ring. I can't have her thwarted."

Randal shot a sullen glance at him, and said, doggedly:

"I'm very sorry, but it can't be done. You can have one made for her like it."

"Impossible!" I said. "A gem like that may not be copied. The man who carved that wonderful face is long since dead——"

"You can sit for the likeness yourself, for a new one," Randal interrupted. "God knows you're the very image of the Nemesis!"

Philip frowned angrily, and essayed to speak, but I held up my hand, imposing silence.

"Listen!" I said. "Give up the ring before it is too late. Against that jewel, dimming its brilliant surface, two cold dead lips once pressed—my mother's lips. Her last kiss was for Nemesis. Her last breath blurred the face of Nemesis. I need the ring. Will you give it up?"

"No!"

I leaned forward and smiled coldly into his haggard eyes.

"Then beware, for you are doomed! Two sleuth-

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

hounds follow fast upon your trail—my mother and Nemesis! Beware, lest they run you down at last!”

Randal strove to laugh, but failed; then drank more wine. The hand that lifted the glass shook visibly, in spite of his efforts to steady it.

I looked at Philip and raised my eyebrows.

“Après!”

“Come, Randal, don’t be a fool!” He spoke good-humoredly, but I saw that his obstinacy was aroused. “Don’t make a fuss about a trifle! Tell your uncle you’ve lost the ring. A lie more or less doesn’t matter to you—you’re used to them!”

He laughed with easy, contemptuous good-nature. Randal was reaping a bitter harvest. He did not answer; but, with eyes cast down, drew a pattern on the table-cloth with a shaking finger. Would nothing sting him into action? Was every spark of manhood dead within him?

“Seeing that one emerald is as good as another in Mr. St. John’s eyes, he may be willing to exchange my mother’s Nemesis for the other, that once was hers, but is now in your possession.”

“In my possession, Athena?” said Philip, looking at me in surprise.

“Once set as a brooch, but now in a dagger’s hilt. The emerald Julie stole.”

François, the perfect butler, refilling Randal’s ever-empty glass, continued pouring until the wine overflowed upon the snowy cloth; but his carelessness passed unnoticed. The uneasiness that had been apparent in the manner of the others now communicated itself to Philip, but it lasted a few moments only. Then he smiled, and said:

“Think of your knowing that, Pet! I knew you bore Minerva’s name, but I had no idea she had dowered you with her divining power!”

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I can't give up the ring," persisted Randal. "What's the use of talking about it?"

"You must," said Philip, sternly.

"You love to gamble," I interposed; "why not play for it? Put dagger and ring side by side. Who wins—has both."

Philip's eyes sparkled.

"So be it!" he cried, gayly. "You owe me my revenge, Randal, my boy! We'll play for the emeralds. You've won from me steadily of late—your luck may hold, *qui sait?*"

But I thought from the look in his eyes that Randal stood no chance.

"I don't want to play to-night," he protested. "I won't."

"Yes, you will. You can't, as a gentleman, refuse me my revenge, because it's my last chance to ask it. We sail early to-morrow morning. Had you forgotten?"

"Had you forgotten?" I echoed, and rose to leave the room.

"We come with you, darling," said Philip. "You shall be enthroned on this divan and watch us play. Only I must not look at you or I shall forget the cards!"

He led me to a couch by the library door, and busied himself in placing a footstool beneath my feet, a mass of cushions behind me; then stood contemplating, admiring me—his property.

"My God, how glorious you are, Athena! Your white beauty stands out like marble against these crimson cushions! One kiss, my wife, just one, to bring me luck!"

He stooped to take it. I held up my right hand to ward him off, receiving the kiss intended for my lips upon my open palm. He drew back, smiling indulgently.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"I must wait? But later, Athena?"

I closed my fingers tight upon the kiss. "Later?" I repeated, slowly. "Later—should Fate so order—I will give it back."

"Come!" cried Randal, impatiently. "In the devil's name, let's get to work!"

"You should make allowances for me to-night, Randal," said Philip, exultantly, as he rejoined him. "You should remember that, thanks to you, this is my wedding-night!"

"Yes—he should remember," I said, clearly.

Either by accident or design François had set the card-table directly in front of the statue of Fortune. The goddess gleamed, white and stately, among her palms and ferns. I looked at her. She had always favored Philip—would she do so now?

The two men were seated so that neither turned his back to me, but Randal's face was most fully in view. I watched it keenly. The dagger lay at Philip's right hand. The emerald in its golden hilt shot forth one strange green ray, like the eye of a live thing—watching.

"Bring wine," said Randal, as François was gliding away.

"My dear boy!" expostulated Philip. "Don't you think you've had about enough?"

He spoke kindly, but Randal resented his remonstrance.

"Do you grudge me an extra bottle? Out with it, if that's what troubles you!"

"Wine, François!" was Philip's answer.

It was brought, in two decanters, and placed on a table at Randal's elbow. He filled a glass, drank it off, then said he was ready.

"Put the ring by the dagger, won't you?" said Philip.

"I'll wear it till I lose it," was the sullen rejoinder.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

"As you please," said Philip, and the game began.

Although the hall was lighted with a quantity of lamps and candles—Philip loved a bright house—it seemed full of shadows. The fog had stolen in and was lurking in the corners, hiding behind the marble pillars, casting its gloom over all; laying a misty finger on the lamps, flinging a veil about the wax-lights, weaving the loosened strands from the pall outside across and across the wide spaces. In the great mirror opposite I saw a slender upright girl, her small head haughtily erect, her eyes and hair gleaming, her face, shoulders, arms—as if carved from marble—as hard, as colorless, as cold. Her gown of white satin shimmered, lustrous as a pearl, against the divan's rich crimson. I was indeed very white, white enough to hold the fancy of the dark man who had chosen to seize me. White enough to claim protection of the fair-skinned gentleman who had chosen to sell me—now half maddened by the sale.

I sat quite still and waited. What would Randal do? From the moment I had seen him wince when Philip kissed my hands, I had spoken and acted for him alone. I had done all I could. Before him lay a stiletto. It was long, and keen, and sharp. He had but to send it home. I waited, motionless, and all the inanimate things the hall contained seemed to wait with me—to hold their breath and listen to the rustle of the cards, to the few low-spoken words of the players. The clock struck the half-hour, half-past nine. Then came the sound of laughter—triumphant, insolent, musical.

Philip had won!

XXXVIII

Philip won badly, not attempting to conceal his exultation. Randal lost as badly, showing too plainly his chagrin.

With an air of good-humored superiority Philip leaned both elbows on the table, and said, smiling:

"Well, I hope you are satisfied! Now, hand over my wife's ring."

Randal rose suddenly, his chair grating on the marble as he pushed it back. Philip stared at him, then sprang to his feet.

"You mean you won't?" he cried. "Come, don't be a fool! You've taken too much wine. Try to behave like a gentleman. This is a debt of honor—gentlemen pay their debts of honor. Even you must, Randal—once in a while."

He laughed insolently.

Randal took a step forward, his comely face almost unrecognizable from passion, so ghastly white save for the pink blotches that came and went with his breathing.

"Well, must I take it from you?" said Philip.

"Take this—instead, you damned nigger, and learn your place!" As the words hissed through his teeth he struck Philip across the face. The next instant they were struggling together like wild beasts.

I saw Randal disengage one hand and try to seize the dagger. Philip, too quick for him, got it first. I rose to my feet. What was coming? They had forgotten me—both mad with rage. A moment they swayed back and forth, then Philip lifted his right

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

arm high above his head—there was the gleam of steel—Randal flung up his hand, warding off the blow—I saw the blaze of Nemesis, and, springing swiftly forward, caught him as he fell—the death-wound in his breast.

Half dragging, half carrying, I got him to the couch I had just left, and lifting him upon it supported his head on my bosom. I knew that he was dying. I spoke his name gently:

“Randal!”

He opened his blue eyes wide and looked at me. The old ugly smile curved his lips.

“Nemesis——”

At this effort to speak the blood welled up, choking him. I raised his head higher. He struggled for breath. A strong convulsion racked him—the red stained the lace upon my breast. He turned his head to one side, sighed deeply—and passed.

I laid the fair head on a cushion. He looked, suddenly, so very peaceful. Lifting the limp hand, pressed close against his wound, I drew off the ring and put it on my finger. It was wet with blood.

“Athena!”

I turned slowly and faced the speaker. He was replacing a glass upon the tray. One of the decanters was quite empty.

“Athena — my God! You are covered with blood!”

I looked down. The pearly whiteness of the satin was dulled by ugly spots of red. I shuddered.

“Athena, my darling, I am not to blame. I struck in self-defence. He insulted me foully.” Philip spoke pleadingly, his eyes full of wistful tenderness. Never had his beautiful voice been so exquisitely modulated, never had its rich tones sounded more sweetly. I made no answer. I stood quite still. But I met his gaze fully.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Suddenly his expression changed. A look of doubt, of suspicion, swept across his face.

"You heard what that carrion said?"

"I know everything," I said, slowly. "On the night she died Madam told me all."

For a very long moment there was silence in the great hall. The man by the card-table stood as still as I, stunned by my knowledge of the truth. Then he recovered himself.

"It doesn't matter much after all, seeing you are my wife."

"No! Never! So help me God!"

Philip smiled, mockingly. The devil within him broke its chains and looked at me through his eyes. I made ready. I tried to stand exactly as I had been taught by my father, who now, I was sure, stood close beside me, calling out his orders. The old childish desire to do him credit took strange possession of me. I poised myself lightly, easily, upon my feet, letting my arms hang loosely at my sides, balling my hands into fists. I prayed to God for help, but—I thought of my father and Nemesis!

With an air of insolent triumph, the mocking smile still curving his full lips, Philip moved slowly toward me, with the easy grace of a wild beast. As he approached I watched him, waiting till his foot should touch a line on the marble floor that marked the proper distance. It did so. I sprang forward and struck him, with my left, where the ribs curve from the breastbone. Being unexpected, the blow served its purpose, bringing his head forward, and, with lightning swiftness, down crashed Nemesis upon his forehead. Without word or groan he fell, limp and senseless, at my feet.

I turned to Randal, and, searching through his pockets, found the key of the door in the boundary wall. Slipping it into my bosom and drawing off

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

my slippers, lest the click of their heels on the marble floor should betray me, I stole out into the night.

No sentinel was on guard—Philip had been so sure of his own strength. I closed the library window noiselessly behind me, and, dropping from the veranda, was swallowed up by the fog. I drew my long train over one arm; with the other felt my way cautiously through the darkness. I was going to Mr. Beverley.

Broad bands of light streamed from the kitchen windows, cutting their way through the fog like the solid ray from a dark lantern, and made the surrounding gloom still blacker. The servants were feasting in honor of their master's wedding. I kept carefully away from these bars of brightness, and at last my shoeless feet touched the gravel of the path. Slowly I made my way through the wet pall of darkness to the spot where the path divided. To the right it led upward to Madam's grave, to the left downward to the boundary wall. As I turned to follow this last I thought I heard footsteps far behind me, someone coming rapidly along the path. I listened. I held my breath. Yes, there could be no mistake—I was pursued.

Sick with despair, I left the path. Holding my arm before my face to protect it from too sudden contact with the trees, I thrust my feet, in their thin silk stockings, almost fiercely in among the ferns, seeking a way between the rocks. My arm struck suddenly against a tree, its rough bark slimy with moisture. I crept around its great trunk, and, crouching, felt about me for a loose stone or jagged bit of rock with which to defend myself; but my groping fingers touched only damp earth, wet moss, slimy tree-roots! And still the steps came on.

My heart beat so violently the air seemed filled with the noise of its throbbing. Then, through this

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

sound, one penetrated, which brought the blood to my face with a rush, an odd, scuff-scuffing, slovenly trot upon the gravel. It was Don!

For a few moments after the dog, whining with delight, had found me, I felt only pleasure in his coming, then remembered he might but serve as a chain to drag me back. Who had set him on my trail? Not Philip. Too short a time had passed since I left him. He might not be dead. Never before had I struck to kill, so I could not know, but my blow had been one to stun, for an hour at least. Those who were using Don were the servants! This thought sapped my strength. I no longer felt as when facing Philip, indomitable, invincible. Then I had first given Randal his chance to defend me, because it was his duty. I had dealt him strict justice, knowing that should he fail, I could protect myself. I was Athena Derohan—yes, even Pallas Athena! Now——

I strained my ears to hear each sound, my arms clasped tight around the dog's great shoulders, my cheek against him, caressing him to silence. The moisture from some over-burdened leaf fell, now and again, upon the bald surface of a rock hard by. The feathered inmate of a neighboring nest stirred, with gentle flutter of soft wings, into still deeper repose. Save for these woodland sounds, deep quiet was everywhere. My Don had come alone.

I rose to my feet, and, holding fast his collar, stumbled through the awful darkness back to the path. Slowly, the dog close beside me, I reached at last the door, unlocked it, and passed through. Gathering a handful of mud and gravel, I stuffed the keyhole. Should any follow they would find the lock hampered. Then, still clinging to my companion, I recommenced my Hegira. The path sloped downward sharply. I heard below me the musical

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

song of a brook. This we crossed by a rustic bridge, and found, just beyond, a flight of steps leading upward. Once these were mounted I knew I should strike the avenue leading to the Towers. Thank God, I should soon be safe! I was half way up them, when Don, slipping, lurched heavily against me. I put out my hand in search of something to save me, and, finding nothing, crashed down through trees and underbrush to the border of the brook. The dog fell with and on me. I lost consciousness.

The first thing I felt was Don's nose against my cheek. I opened my eyes—blackness everywhere. The dog began to lick my face. I tried to rise. A sickening pain shot through me, and the darkness was suddenly dazzling with flashes of yellow light. I sank back, suppressing a groan. I had twisted my ankle. The fall had loosened my hair. It hung, a sodden mass, over my bare shoulders. It seemed a part of the darkness that blinded me, of the fog that was smothering me. I gasped for breath. Should I ever reach Beverley Towers?

There came a sharp sound through the night—the piercing shriek of a locomotive. Then, with rumble and roar, the train swept by, on the track not far below. Telling myself that it was the night express, that midnight had come, that were Philip alive he might be close upon me, I struggled to my feet, clinging to the shoulders of my faithful dog, and, half-crazed by pain, groped my way back to the steps, and, somehow, surmounted them.

In falling I had struck my head, and so been stunned. My temples ached. I felt odd, feverish, sick—unlike myself, yet struggled on toward the Towers, and the dog helped me. He braced himself to support the hand on his back. Steadily, bravely, suiting his easy tread to my faltering step, he bore me company. Again and again, the pain

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

too great for endurance, I sank down, feeling I could go no farther. Then, through the black veil of night and fog, came a face—so close to mine—a dark, beautiful face, the eye alight with a devilish purpose. With a moan of horror I was up and stumbling forward as before.

Suddenly, when convinced that the pain and the struggle would never end, the fog became luminous. A broad band of light shone through it from a window—the window of Mr. Beverley's library. We had reached the Towers. With Don's help I limped up on the veranda, and hobbling to the window—it was closed—looked in.

On the hearth-rug, his back to a bright wood-fire, stood Mr. Beverley. As I saw his kind, yet somewhat stern face, I remembered his affection for Randal. Must I break the news of his shame to this upright man?

A wave of pain, a deathly sensation of faintness, warned me to haste. I tapped on the glass. Staring in surprise, Mr. Beverley crossed the room and flung open the window.

"My God! Miss Derohan!"

He stood aside, while Don and I entered. As if mechanically, he pushed an easy-chair toward me, motioning me to sit down. But I stood, still confronting him, a great pity for the kind old man filling my heart, blotting out all else. Torn, wet, dishevelled, my white gown stained with grass and mud—and those ugly dull red spots—my hair hanging loose about me, and my ghastly face bearing the marks of my fall, I stood before Mr. Beverley, silent, searching for words in which to tell him gently of Randal's crime and its awful punishment.

Suddenly, from over his shoulder, a dark face smiled into mine. The brilliant eyes sparkled with malignant triumph. It came nearer, nearer. I no

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

longer saw Mr. Beverley. Only black mist and—that face. I took my hand from Don's shoulder, tried to poise myself lightly on my bruised feet, balled my cold hands into fists, heard my own voice cry:

"Never—so help me God!" and fell forward unconscious.

XXXIX

When I forced my way back to consciousness—through the sickening sensations that follow a fainting turn—I thought I was beside the brook again. My face and throat were drenched with ice-cold moisture, my eyes blinded by a yellow glare of dancing lights. Don's nose pressed close against my shoulder. He was growling, in odd, subdued fashion, a growl deep in his chest.

"She is coming to—stand back, sir, stand back! Yes, yes—I will be gentle."

My head was lifted a little; the rim of a wine-glass touched my lips.

"Drink this, please."

I opened my eyes again, and knew where I was. Mr. Beverley was holding the wine-glass. "Drink!" he commanded, sternly, and I obeyed.

As the fiery stuff ran through my veins, bringing back my senses and giving me fictitious strength, it revived my fears as well. The windows of the room were open to give me air. Were Philip not dead he might enter—or was he already here? To whom had the old man spoken? I must know.

"Philip?" in an agonized whisper.

"He has not come."

"Oh, shut the windows, please, and draw the curtains close——"

Mr. Beverley crossed the room stiffly, and slowly, with neat precision, did as I had asked. Then he

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

came back and stood, looking down upon me. In the deep-set eyes, gleaming beneath bushy, white eyebrows, I read intense disapproval and dislike—Dick's uncle resented my coming! My pride, always at my elbow, stung me to new effort. I tried to rise from the lounge on which I had been placed; my brain reeled; I sank back, with a moan of pain. Cold pity, the kind felt for an unfortunate but repulsive person, mingled with the dislike in Mr. Beverley's expression. He brought more brandy, but I would not touch it. I remembered Dick's letter left with this uncle, charging him to care for me, the letter to which no heed had been given. My heart grew hard; then, remembering the news I had to tell, softened through pity. I did not know how to deal this blow gently. My head was on fire. Thoughts chased each other swiftly through its heated brain. My mind, always slow, but at least methodical in its processes, had become, like Madam's, a strange jumble of odds and ends. I feared to open my lips. If I did, what words might rush out first?

"Are you able to answer a few questions, Miss Derohan?" said Mr. Beverley, thus taking the matter out of my hands.

"Yes."

"When did you return from California?"

Again that strange absurdity; who was its originator?

"I have never been there."

A look of incredulous surprise followed.

"Then where have you been?"

"At Highgrove Hall." And, seeing disbelief in the old man's eyes, the strange torrent of thought and words broke loose, crowding from my lips in disordered haste. "Where else, when Madam needed me—and Dick was dead? Where else, but there? And now again I am alone! You saw the torches

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

the night we buried her—or Randal told you—but no, he was not there. It was yesterday he came—hush! What was that?

The clock on the chimney-piece told the hour. I counted with it. "Only eleven? Yet it was the night-express I heard, below there by the brook. There is someone in the room! Who is it? Not Philip—you are sure? I heard a sigh, I thought—but no, of course he is not here. If he were—hush! Was that the sound of footsteps? If he comes he will say that I am his wife. I am not. It was Randal who answered for me; Randal, who sold me for forty pieces of silver— Ah! forgive me! I meant to speak gently, to prepare you—yes, he is dead, quite dead. Philip killed him, but Nemesis gave the order. Don't look at those ugly marks on my satin; first Richard—then Randal! You are all alone, too. Poor old man! You hate me, but I am sorry for you. So very sorry! Randal had to die. He could not live after his crime. He repented—at the last, when I told him what Philip was. Randal was wicked, of course—gambling, drinking—a *vaurien*, as Madam said; but I am a Derohan, and white. Had he known, he might have stood by me. It was Philip's black blood that— Is that he? We struck to kill, Nemesis and I, but——"

I stopped short. Mr. Beverley was asking a question. I was vaguely aware that he had repeated it many times; but it was well-nigh impossible to stop the strange wheels in my head that were churning my thoughts around and around, turning them into words. It was terrible.

"Who told me Dick was dead, you ask? Randal. He died in Russia, long, long ago. First his letters stopped coming—you understand I am not Philip's wife? You believe me? Yes, I see you do. Can you give me something to stop these wheels in my

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

head—something to thrust between the spokes? Can I bear a great shock? Is that what you are asking? I can bear anything. I am Athena——”

Ah, what was this? Who was coming between me and Mr. Beverley? A tall, broad-shouldered man—a man with an honest, ugly face. The wheels in my head stood still, for—oh, it was Dick!

Poor Mr. Beverley! In his anxiety to steady me, to startle me into self-control, that I might tell him of Randal—well, he naturally was not over-particular as to the result of the means used. As for Dick, his impatience to assure me of his safety was not greatly to be wondered at. But happiness, like all else, must be indulged in moderately to prove wholesome. Although Mr. Beverley's experiment succeeded in toning me up to the task of speaking clearly—I gave the facts of my story in a few words—it was injurious to my health. Before an hour had passed I was crazy with fever, and Dick had gone through the fog to Droneton for a doctor.

My illness was not a serious one, nor did it last more than ten days, thanks to my iron constitution. The quickness with which I responded to treatment pleased the doctor—doctors are so odd—and we became friends. It was he who told me what took place while I lay ill, when, after caring for me, he went with Dick to look for Randal. Mr. Beverley, anxious to have Philip brought to justice, counselled a warrant and detectives from Droneton. Richard, in dread of seeing me on the witness-stand, the central figure in an affair that was certainly disgraceful, tried to gain time. He would go first to the Hall and learn the exact state of the case. Were Erranti alive, he might have made his escape on the yacht; if dead—then it must be remembered who must be shielded.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Uncle and nephew felt alike in regard to me. It was unmixed horror that I might have taken a human life. Both men hoped that Philip, Randal's murderer, Philip, my deadliest enemy, might be alive. Yet, should he prove to be, they purposed having the law hang him! Their reasoning was beyond me. I understood them as little as they me.

It was near dawn when Dick, with the doctor, reached the Hall. The fog still held, and the house, close-shuttered, looked as though none watched within. After circling the veranda they rang, once, twice, thrice. At last shuffling footsteps approached, the door was clumsily unlocked and opened, as by an unaccustomed hand, and an anxious-faced Frenchman peered out. In answer to their questions he invited them to enter and examine for themselves, saying he knew nothing of the events of the evening, save that Mr. Erranti had been married. He, the Frenchman, had been engaged to care for the house during the absence of Mr. and Mrs. Erranti abroad. He had, he said, retired immediately after dinner, not feeling well; had been waked at half-past twelve by Mr. Cray, who bade him rise and lock the house. Mr. Cray had informed him that the arrangements had been changed, and that all save he, Mr. Cray, who must join the others immediately, were already embarked!

The man's manner was convincing. He evidently knew nothing.

A thorough search revealed no trace of what had been done. The divan to which I had carried Randal bore no stain, the marble floor was spotless—and Randal, with the other inmates of the Hall, had disappeared.

Baffled, disappointed, Dick was obliged to yield to

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Mr. Beverley's wishes, to go to New York at once and secure the help of the police—this sorely against his will, because of me. But the end was very near. Before the morning was over many had heard of the sinking of the yacht *Charlotte*, by a collision with a steamer in the bay. The yacht, cut almost in two, sank immediately, only one person, besides the captain and crew, being saved. This was Mathilde, who owed her life to her constitutional stolidity. Instead of struggling she had remained passive, as usual, and had been picked up floating on the water. Julie, fighting fiercely for her life, sank as the rescuing party arrived.

Of the events of the previous evening at Highgrove Hall Mathilde would say nothing, professing complete ignorance. The captain, however, told willingly of what had occurred previous to the accident. He said that at half-past ten on Friday evening Cray had brought word that Mr. Erranti would be on board within the hour, and wished to start at once down the river. The captain, because of the fog, had remonstrated, but Cray had assured him that Mr. Erranti was determined to have his way. It was not, however, until nearly twelve that Mr. Erranti came, and then appeared to be under the influence of liquor, as Cray and François helped him on board between them, and he staggered as he walked. Besides these three and the two Frenchwomen no one else had come.

When questioned carefully by Richard, the captain confessed that something for which he could not account had happened. Less than an hour after getting under way he had heard a sudden splash on the starboard side—the sound as of a heavy weight being heaved overboard. Fearing one of his passengers might have met with an accident, he investigated the matter at once, but could learn nothing,

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

though Cray and François had been on deck at the time and had also heard the noise. Later Mr. Erranti had grown violent. Cray and François had locked themselves in the cabin with their master, who had fought them so furiously that Cray had given him "a little something to quiet him." This the captain said he took to mean "a good smell of chloroform!" Shortly after came the collision.

As I listened to the doctor's account, I understood all that had taken place at the Hall, after my flight, as well as if I had been one of the actors in the strange happenings of that Friday night. I imagined I had seen François returning, in his uneasy curiosity, to peep through the dining-room door at the card-players, and at his master's white-faced bride; imagined I could hear his instantly suppressed exclamation of alarm, as he caught sight of Randal's dead body, on the divan, and that other figure, upon the floor. I knew how slowly he had approached the two, his shifty eyes searching every corner for the shimmer of my white satin, and finding, instead, only my white slippers to show where I had been.

Then came the hasty summons of Julie and Cray, the consultation of what was to be done. All three stood in dread of the law, and now young St. John had been done to death—by whom? Their master still lived, he was only stunned. Julie and Cray knew well whose hand had dealt the blow; they remembered my early training, had known me, and my nature, long.

Their decision, too, was easily understood. If dead men tell no tales, their destroyed bodies give no clues. Randal's poor empty shell had been thrust into some box or trunk, carried on board the yacht and, later, heavily weighted, dropped overboard by the

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

two confederates, Cray and François. The fog made secret deeds easy.

And Philip? Revived, but still giddy and stupid from the blow, he had been taken on board the Charlotte, where, when his senses had returned, he had raged at his captors, striving to overpower them, to regain his supremacy, to return to the Hall. Then they had resorted to chloroform. He had been under its influence when the yacht sank; he was never seen again.

Although I thought it well that Philip was dead, I could not but rejoice that he had died painlessly. And I was thankful that the river had engulfed all that remained of poor, faulty Randal. He had had the chance to become a worker of good—he had died a criminal. It was he who had been Philip's ever-ready tool. When Philip had forged a farewell letter from me to Dick, breaking our engagement—on the plea of having discovered that I did not really care for him—Randal wrote saying I had confided my change of feeling to him; then told the same story to Mr. Beverley. Later, when Philip, always employing my handwriting, returned Dick's pleading letters unopened, Randal wrote again to tell of my having gone to California.

It had all been a simple matter to the two unscrupulous men. I had no friends to interest themselves in my affairs. I had been completely at Philip's mercy; yet, by the grace of God, I had escaped. Very humbly, my heart overflowing with gratitude, I gave thanks.

Early in June Richard and I were married. Our honeymoon was spent at Beverley Towers; we could not leave Mr. Beverley alone with his grief. To my distress, the story of my connection with Highgrove

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Hall got into the newspapers. This was because of Philip's will. In it he had said that I was to be his wife, and so left me everything. It had been made the day following Madam's death.

I was not allowed to accept a penny. I wished to endow a large charity, in dear Madam's name; to make of the Hall a home for poor old ladies. My husband would not hear of it. I still think he was in the wrong. It was right, only just, that Philip's money should have been used in a way that he would have approved. He loved Madam. Anything done in memory of her would have pleased him. My husband was obdurate. Philip's wealth was swept into the coffers of the State.

But Mr. Beverley was very kind. He bought in Highgrove Hall and gave it me, that Madam's grave might not be disturbed. This thought had made me unhappy. The house was mine for two days only; then, at night, it burned to the ground. I have always felt sure that Surly Pat, who thought misfortune entered the Hall with me, set fire to the place. But I never told of this belief. I was far too grateful to him for ridding me of an incubus. The Hall was too full of evil memories. I was glad to be mistress of the land only.

When Lord Ebbrides heard of my marriage he sent me my mother's emeralds as his wedding-gift. Although I had no wish to accept them, Richard's fury, at what he termed an insult, surprised me. They were to have been returned at once, but Mr. Beverley again interfered, and, after several letters had been exchanged between him and the Viscount, bought them and gave them to me himself. He has always been so very kind. When I try to express my gratitude he pats my cheek, and says he can never do enough to make up for past bad behavior—

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

meaning his belief in Randal's story of my having thrown Dick over—and in other tales told.

Mr. Beverley is grown a very old gentleman, ninety odd. May he live many years! He no longer collects rare antiques, saying the last added is so very remarkable he may never hope to find such another; then he laughs and—looks at me.

"A goddess, a marble Athena, yet a creature of flesh and blood! A young antique! A Pagan, yet a good churchwoman! After discovering, securing such a curio," he winds up, "there is nothing left to desire!"

Dick's mother does not agree with him. She lives in Germany, so it does not matter much.

Dick, who is occasionally sentimental, bought the old farmstead, on Long Island, where we first met. Mrs. Spuyten, learning this, wrote him a letter of congratulation—the first notice she had taken of our marriage.

"I hear you have decided to live in retirement. I am glad. I congratulate you upon your good sense. Society does talk unpleasantly of your wife. Of course, as a distant connection, I close my ears when people insist that where there was so much *smoke* there must have been a little *fire*! A pity that Athena did not check the man Erranti's advances *at once*, as a truly *good* girl might have been expected to do. If she had listened to my advice she would never have entered that *Den of Iniquity*. I make allowances, however, as a true Christian should. I hope you may always remember her *bringing up*, and watch her every step," etc., etc.

Richard has never forgiven her. I did not mind for myself; but as some people probably thought as she said, I was, because of my husband and Mr. Beverley, extremely sorry.

THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

Looking back, reviewing my life at Highgrove Hall carefully, I fail to see any vital mistake made. At least I strove hard to do my best—and Nemesis stood my friend.

My husband tells me I am at heart a Pagan. I know that I believe in Nemesis!

THE END

**This book should be returned to
the Library on or before the last date
stamped below.**

**A fine of five cents a day is incurred
by retaining it beyond the specified
time.**

Please return promptly.

~~DEC - 7 '55 H~~

